10 MID-RANGE BCDS RATED AND REVIEWED

PHILIPPINES: GOING MACRO IN MALAPASCUA

RAS MOHAMMED ON A REBREATHER – SIMPLY STUNNING

WINING AND DIVING: THE EUROPEAN TOUR ROLLS INTO ITALY

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Steve and Cindy Moore, April 2015

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# Editor's LETTER

## Get the whole family involved!

By the time this magazine hits the newstands and floormats, I will have just returned from an assignment to Bonaire, this time with the entire Evans family in tow. I was out in the Dutch Caribbean to attend Kid's Sea Camp, an innovative idea with a global reach (KSC events happen at resorts and on liveaboards across the world, with more coming online all the time), which aims to encourage people with children to keep diving by getting the youngsters involved in the water from a very early age.

The Evans clan has previously been to a Kid's Sea Camp in Grand Cayman a few years ago, when Luke was just five and a half. Then he was in the 'Turtles', the entry-level group, and during his time at KSC he went snorkelling and SASYing (snorkelling, but on a little cylinder on the surface), as well as other topside activities, while my wife and I cracked out mornings of proper full-on diving without wondering what he was up to.

This time around, at eight and a half, he was in the SEAL Team, and before he went he was champing at the bit to get stuck into the various Aquamissions that would see him well on his way towards achieving his goal - Master SEAL Team Diver - which I have to admit does sound damn cool! He was all set for night dives, treasure hunts, search and recovery and even getting involved in a Zombie Diver Distinctive Specialty.

If you've got kids and want to get them involved, why not head down to the Anglesey ScubaFest on 15-16 August - PADI is running a Pool Party where children (and adults) can snorkel or complete a Discover Scuba Diving session for free. What better way to secure your diving future than by getting your younglings hooked from the age of eight...

**MARK EVANS**, EDITOR

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PHOTOGRAPHER JEREMY CUFF

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TURN TO PAGE 36

# NEWS

Each month, we collate the latest industry news from right here in the UK, as well as all over our water planet. To find out the most up-to-date news and views, check out the website: **www.sportdiver.co.uk**

# The world's first underwater dive shop

TEKCamp attendees where privileged to be the first divers to visit a world-first - the 'Pop Down' dive shop, located at 7.5m in Vobster Quay. **MARK EVANS** finds out how it came into being

Photographs by **JASON BROWN**

"You have to visit the 'Pop Down' shop," said Sport Diver snapper Jason Brown. "It will make for some great photographs." I'd just arrived at the annual TEKCamp event at Vobster Quay (full report in Tech Diver next month) and so wondered what on earth he was talking about. He gestured to the water's edge, where various 'Pop Down' shop signs were emblazoned with the Fourth Element logo and a cave arrow pointing into the water. My curiosity suitably aroused, I sought out Fourth Element's Jim Standing for the full lowdown.

"On the last day of TEKCamp in 2014, at the end of a sweltering week, beset with a decidedly un-British heatwave, I stood on the edge of Vobster, which looked invitingly cool and chatted casually with Martin Robson and Tim Clements about how it would be a good thing to do something a little different in 2015," explained Jim. "After four years of supporting the proceedings with demo gear and a friendly face for people to approach for product advice, I felt we needed to spice things up a bit. I put the next words out of my mouth down to perhaps a mild case of heatstroke. 'Martin, do you think it would be possible to use a habitat to set up the world's first underwater pop-up shop? That would be cool, and definitely different' I asked, thinking 'That doesn't sound too hard'.

"The look on Tim's face belied his cautiously optimistic addition: 'Yeah, that sounds interesting' - his face said 'You have got to be joking'. Clearly, having set a habitat up at Vobster once before, Tim knew that the logistics were clearly somewhat more challenging than my naive question allowed for. But after a few seconds, Martin's considered response was 'Leave it to me - I have an idea'.

"Of course, we couldn't leave it entirely to him, but the logistics of rigging a habitat, making it safe for relatively inexperienced users and training us before we got into the habitat was something that required an almost unique set of skills".

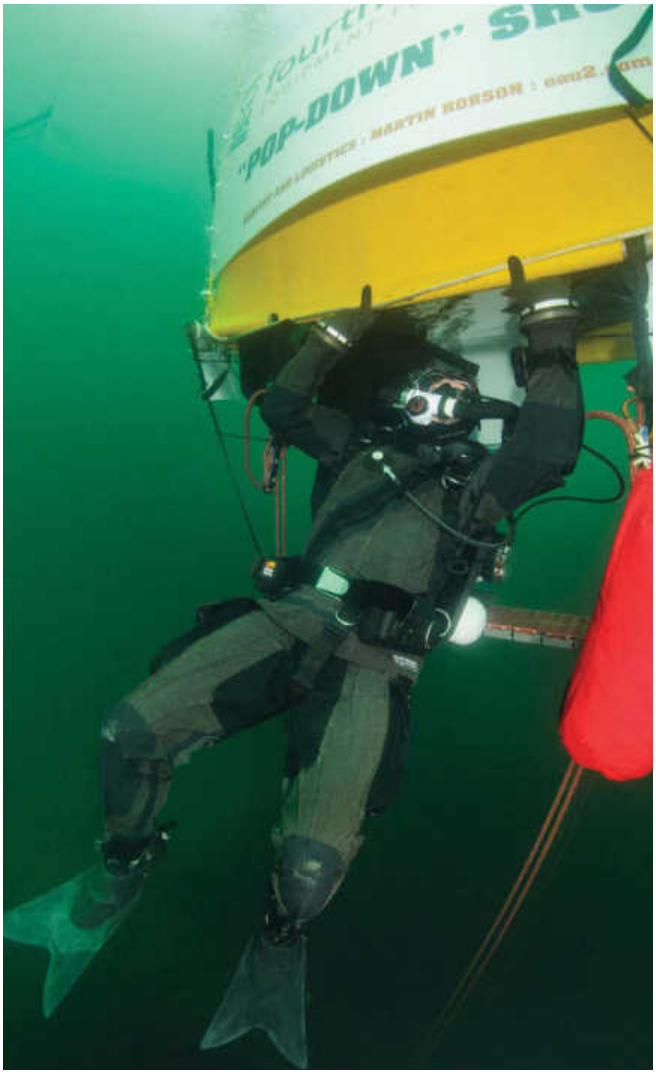
And so it fell to Martin Robson to come up with a way of creating the underwater dive shop…

"Making Jim's idea become reality was no easy feat. Installing a habitat never is! It took four divers close to ten hours to set up the 'Pop Down' shop," said Martin. "With our dive kit tested and ready to go, the next few hours were spent on the surface assembling as much of the habitat as we could. Allen keys and spanners in hand, we put the metal frame into the skin of the habitat and attached lines and caving descenders, all of which needed double checking to make sure they were rigged the right way around.

"On the first dive we fixed the anchors to the crushing works in Vobster - and believe me, ratchet straps and webbing are easier to use on dry land!

"Next, we fixed buoys to the habitat and with two divers in the water, the other two manhandled the structure into the water. Not an easy task given its size and weight.

"We floated the habitat out and over the anchor points. Using the




buoys and lines to control the descent rate, we let some air out via a valve and the habitat slowly sank to the point where we could attach the down lines from the descenders to the anchors. Once connected we re-inflated the habitat and used the descenders to carefully level it out. Another dive to install the floor, fix a seat inside and re-check all the rigging and the habitat was set up."

Martin continued: "However, the job was not quite complete as four very tired divers still had to turn the habitat into the shop. We installed Fourth Element signs on the habitat itself and indirectly above, at the surface. This was not as simple as it sounds (it probably looked quite comical) as we struggled to control two large and very buoyant signs

while fixing them in place.

"There was still work to do on Monday morning as TEKCamp started, with the 'shop fittings', shop staff training in habitat entry techniques and safety checks. The rigging, anchors and gas quality inside (which was replenished twice a day) kept me quite busy on top of TEKCamp workshop sessions, but it was all worth it to see the look on the faces of the divers who went 'shopping' and to introduce them to a whole new world."

He was right. I duly joined the ranks of happy, smiling divers, nipping to the 'Pop Down' shop when Jim was in residence as the 'manager' to buy my exclusive Fourth Element Underwater Inhabitant T-shirt.

For more information about habitats, or to attend a course focused on their construction and use, check out: **www.eau2.com** ■

***So what is a habitat and how do they work?***

*Basically, a habitat is an underwater air bell which a diver can enter to decompress. It can be a solid construction, such as a bulk container, or a more-flexible skin with a rigid frame to keep the shape. The idea of habitats is to get divers who have a long decompression obligation, or who may even need help, out of the water, dry and warm.*

*Anchored in place via ropes and rigging systems to a fixed object below, or sometimes into the ceiling of a cave, then filled with air, habitats provide a relatively comfortable environment for long decompression.*

*They also offer an extra layer of safety on extreme dives - as well as more comfort, the decompressing diver can eat, drink and often communicate with the surface via a comms system; and air is a better insulator, and the heat coming off a diver can raise the air temperature inside by 4- 6 degrees Celsius within 30 minutes.*

*Habitats do have risks. The atmosphere inside will soon become high in CO2 and low in O2, so the diver will breathe decompression gas, usually O2, surface-supplied where possible, from a BIB mask (similar to those found in a hyperbaric chamber), full-face mask, regulator or may elect to stay on or use a rebreather. They will come off these for short periods, e.g for eating and drinking, so the atmosphere needs careful monitoring.*

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## Brit named World Champion Freediver

British freediver Alice Hickson has been named World Champion Freediver at the Individual AIDA Pool World Championships in Belgrade. Alice won gold and set a new British record with a swim of 174 metres on a single breath and without the aid of fins, smashing her own record.

Having only been freediving for eight months, Alice announced herself to the sport earlier this year, in March, by winning the 'Best Female Newcomer' at the National Pool Championships (The Great Northern) in Liverpool.

Speaking after her record-breaking swim, Alice said: "I was excited to come to the World Championships as I thought it would be a great opportunity to see the competitive world of freediving and gain some experience. I've only ever done one other completion so I didn't know what to expect but so far it's been amazing and totally overwhelming, in a good way.

"The day before the competition I started getting really nervous and doubted my ability to compete against some of the best people in the sport. But then I remembered why I was here, for experience and to enjoy it, so I told my self just 'do your best' and that's all you can do."

## PADI Women's Dive Day

PADI Women's Dive Day took place on Saturday, 18 July and was a great success, involving 335 events across 60 plus countries, 25 US states, and all seven continents (although Antarctica could not complete their dive due to weather). 102 of these events were registered in the EMEA region and the countries with the most events were Russia (18), followed by the UK and Spain.

PADI would like to thank everyone who shared the idea and took part. A spokesperson said that all the support and participation was very much appreciated!

Here's a comment from an attendee at Catalina, California. Great reminder of why PADI does what it does…

"I wanted to thank you for all the time you and the other PADI staff and volunteers put into Woman's Dive Day in Catalina. My daughter had a great day. She had heard a lot about diving Catalina and your event gave her the opportunity to dive there. The event was well organised and there were plenty of volunteers to take care of the participants. The amount of giveaways was amazing. Thank you for a great day of diving. I'm sure all the photos of smiling women divers in different ages and shapes will encourage more women to dive."

Please share any great stories you may have from the day, either via your local PADI centre or direct to PADI at: Sabrina.Redl@padi.com . Participants can purchase Women's Dive Day apparel on: www.padigear.com, and submit photos/videos using the #PADIWomensDiveDay hashtag, or can email Sabrina directly.

And look out for another event around the same time next year!

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# Mayor takes plunge for Girl Power

After taking her first plunge as a pupil of one of Britain's youngest instructors, the Lord Mayor of Bradford has urged more girls and women to give scuba diving a go.

Councillor Joanne Dodds was supervised on her try-dive by Megan Judd.

Megan showed the Lord Mayor Cllr Dodds how to wear her mask, fins and other dive kit, before the dive at Tong High School swimming pool in Bradford.

Afterwards Cllr Dodds lent her backing to the drive to get more women diving, and said she had thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

She said: "It was fantastic. I'm always up for trying new things and this was a first for me and totally out of my comfort zone

"I think campaigns to get more girls and women into diving is great, as it aims to show that we can do way more than we thought we were capable of. If I can try something like this, then anyone can and I would encourage women across the district to take the plunge and go for it.

"Don't let anyone or anything hold you back."

## DDRC Healthcare researcher receives UHMS award

DDRC Healthcare's Research Team Dr Gary Smerdon (CEO) and Marguerite St Leger Dowse recently attended the Annual Scientific Meeting of the Undersea & Hyperbaric Medical Society (UHMS) in Montreal, Canada.

The UHMS is the primary source of information for diving and hyperbaric medicine physiology worldwide. It has in excess of 2,000 members from 50 countries, with the annual scientific meeting recognised as the principle worldwide gathering of the hyperbaric fraternity.

This year it was attended by more than 350 members from around the world who had the opportunity to present their research and clinical observations in the form of 113 posters and 42 oral presentations.

Marguerite presented an oral resume of the 'Health of Divers' project to the UHMS Associates on the Thursday. The following day she and Gary presented a poster outlining some preliminary findings from the latest element of the 'Health of Divers' project - Dental Health.

However, the total surprise of the trip was the Associates Award for Excellence in Presentation given by the UHMS to Marguerite! It is awarded to 'an Associate member for presentations judged to be of clinical, educational and scientific benefit to the hyperbaric community'. In accepting her award, Marguerite paid tribute to Professor Bill Fife, who mentored her in the 1990s and thanked Gary and all those who have contributed to the success of the diving research projects over the year.

The awards were followed by a party - naturally!

## Wallet-friendly £20 camp 'n' dive deal for ScubaFest

The Anglesey ScubaFest is just around the corner (15-16 August) and the organisers have rolled out a budget £20 camp 'n' dive ticket that gets you two nights accommodation and a breakfast bap each morning.

The Anglesey Outdoors Centre is the centre of operations for the event, which offers try-dives, dive kit to trial, RIB charters, and a good social craic on an evening.

**www.theangleseyscubafest.com**

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## Dr Elke Bojanowski to run shark workshop with Oonasdivers

Oonasdivers has announced that marine biologist and shark expert Dr Elke Bojanowski will run a shark workshop from 28 October - 4 November.

Dr Bojanowski has been conducting shark research in Egypt since October 2004. Her research focuses on photo-identification studies of local shark populations, mainly oceanic whitetip sharks, but also grey reef and silky sharks. Additionally a general shark monitoring project has been carried out since 2010.

Marsa Shagra in southern Egypt is the ideal location to learn about shark behaviour and biology from an expert, and dive the world famous Elphinstone reef to be in with a chance to see sharks up close and personal.

The Red Sea Sharks workshop is aimed at divers interested in learning about different aspects of sharks, their biology and conservation. Focus is on the more common Red Sea shark species and the research projects conducted under the umbrella of the Red Sea Sharks (www.redseasharks.org) trust. No previous knowledge of sharks is required.

Weather permitting, daily dive trips to Elphinstone (two dives a day over three days) will be completed, to hopefully encounter some of the amazing predators underwater.

Those who wish to dive in Elphinstone, which is classed as an offshore marine park, must hold a minimum of 50 dives, and PADI Advanced Open Water Diver qualification.

For more information, visit **www.oonasdivers.com.**

## Windmills Diving joins PADI

Cyprus-based dive centre Windmills Diving has become a PADI resort.

Simon Banks, owner of Windmills Dive Centre, said: "We realise it is time to join PADI to strengthen our place in Cyprus.

"Since joining PADI, we have received great support and are noticing an increase in certifications. The support they have given us with our Rebreather promotion and River Reggae party that we are hosting with several other great sponsors has been invaluable.

"We are looking forward to supporting PADI with their Zenobia weekend where we will be offering substantial discounts on Wreck, Deep & Nitrox Specialties."

For more information about Windmills Diving, visit **www.windmillsdiving.com.**

## Oonasdivers unveils Buddy Week BOGOF offer

Oonasdivers has announced it is offering divers the opportunity to buy one dive package and get one free at their southern dive villages in Egypt.

The offer is running as part of the Buddy Week scheme at their Shagra and Nakari villages.

Both Shagra and Nakari villages have extensive and diverse house reefs to which visiting buddies will have unlimited and unguided access. Other outstanding reefs, including Elphinstone, Dolphin House Reef (Samadai) and Abu Dabbab, are also accessible.

For more information about the offer, visit **www.oonasdivers.com/news/buddy-week-buddy-dives-for-free.**

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## One night free in the Maldives on Constellation Fleet's MV Orion

Constellation Fleet Maldives is offering one night free when booking a seven-night holiday on liveaboard MV Orion.

With a saving of USD 320, the offer is available throughout August and September and allows for eight days' diving visiting those iconic Maldives routes such as Pelagic Magic, Manta Madness and the Best of the Maldives.

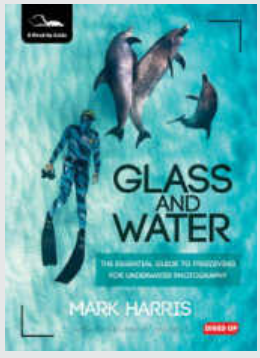
Owner Alex Bryant said: 'To celebrate the new season after the boats have been in for dry dock facelifts we're offering a free night; so book for seven nights and pay for just six."

MV Orion has 12 guest rooms, each finished with the ambiance of a Maldivian Resort, with double/twin beds and tiled en suite bathrooms.

Please note, these offers cannot be used with any other special offers or promotions.

For more information, visit **www.constellation-fleet.com.**

## OUT NOW: Glass and Water




Glass and Water: The Essential Guide to Freediving for Underwater Photography by Mark Harris is the first book on underwater photography for freedivers.

With contributions from expert underwater photographers the book teaches the skills, knowledge and equipment necessary to successfully pursue underwater photography without scuba gear.

Glass and Water is not a replacement for existing books on underwater photography as it focuses on freediving techniques, equipment and photo opportunities which are better suited to freediving.

In 'Part 1: Equipment and Basics' Mark shows how by choosing or adapting freediving and photographic equipment some early hurdles can be avoided. He also explains some underwater photography basics and opportunities for freedivers.

'Part 2: Technique' explains how using appropriate freediving techniques can increase the length of time available for taking photos underwater and help to manage camera ekit.

And in 'Part 3: Perspectives' Mark and a range of informed contributors reveal how to photograph particular animals and their personal approaches to freediving photography. This includes the author's 'Virtual Dive' which pulls together everything covered in the book.

Available now in paperback for £16.95 (ebook forthcoming) from Divedup.com, online and from retailers.

## Save 20% on trips to the Philippines

Divers booking with Regaldive before the end of September 2015 can save up to 20% on Philippine Siren trips.

With remote regions now opening up to liveaboards, a Philippines holiday also offers divers the chance to explore pristine and rarely dived reefs for a true frontier diving experience.

The UNESCO World Heritage Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park is one of Asia's best diving spots and home to hundreds of fish and coral species, as well as 11 types of shark, 12 species of dolphins and whales, and nesting hawksbill and green sea turtles.

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# DIVE DOCTOR: Medical Q&A

LONDON DIVING CHAMBER

**Dr Oliver Firth has gained considerable experience in the field of diving and hyperbaric medicine since joining LDC in 2006. He is an Approved Medical Examiner of Divers for the UK HSE, and a medical referee for the UK Sport Diving Medical Committee. He is involved in the management of all types of diving-related illness, including recompression treatment, as well as providing hyperbaric oxygen therapy for non-diving conditions. He remains a passionate diver and has participated in various expeditions and conservation projects throughout the globe.**

**Q:** I recently broke my thumb (tripping over my wet dog in the dark, would you believe), and have an appointment to have it treated later this week. In five weeks' time, I am booked on the liveaboard of a lifetime in the Galapagos…

So my questions are probably obvious! Will this injury pose a problem for my diving in itself? And if my hand/arm is put in a cast, will I be able to dive? I have no intention of missing out on this chance if at all possible, but I'm now 65 and I'm aware my healing will be slower than a younger person's so I will be longer in a cast (if that's the treatment).

**A:** How terribly unlucky. The smell of a wet dog is, of course, one of the most-pleasurable olfactory sensations known, but tripping over one is an undeserved misfortune indeed. I do actually believe there are mischievous or downright evil sprites that take pleasure in causing accidents of this sort just prior to momentous diving holidays.

All sorts of factors need to be considered here - injury severity and complexity of the surgery, your individual recovery speed (which as you say may be slowed by your advancing years), the type of diving you are doing, etc.

It is possible to dive with a 'waterproof' cast (no such thing exists in reality), but if it is your dominant hand that is affected, it can present practical difficulties as your pincer grip is rather important (for beating off sharks, if nothing else).

There is also a theoretical concern over an increased risk of DCI at the site of recent injury, due to heightened blood flow to the damaged area. However, I have not seen any good evidence that this has actually contributed to DCI, and after five weeks I would expect this risk to be negligible.

If you're out of the cast and have reasonably good hand function before you go, then I think it's safe to proceed with the trip. If not, then I'm sure the hammerheads will put on a particularly good show for you next year

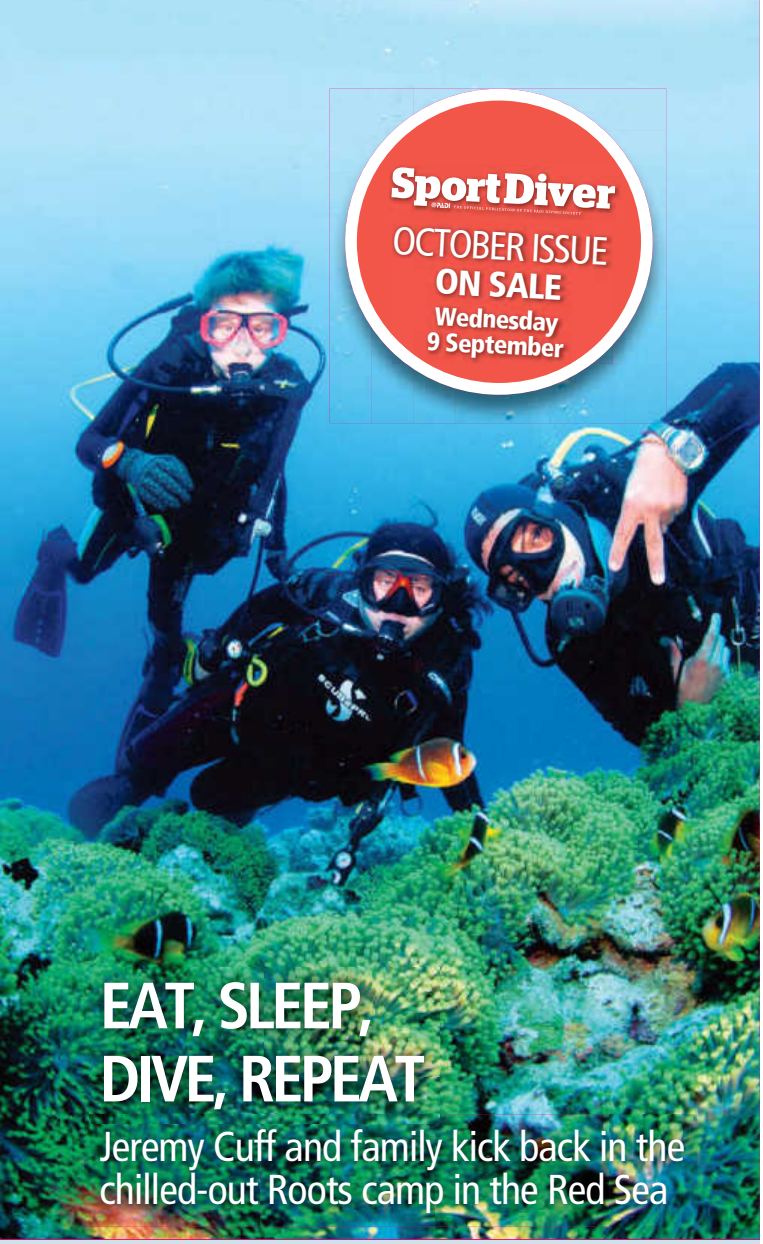
**Q:** I would like to start diving. However, in 2005, after a bit of a nasty cold, I contracted Guillain-Barré syndrome, which left me with foot drop and nerve damage in my legs. The doctors thought I also had a protruding disc in my spine, so I had it removed (L5/S1) in 2007; but this did not really improve my symptoms. Nowadays I can walk pretty well with a stick but need pregabalin and tramadol for pain relief. What are the chances of being able to dive please?

**A:** Another case of terrible bad luck - must be something in the water this month. Guillain-Barré syndrome is named after the French physicians who discovered it in 1916. It is pretty rare, at one or two cases per 100,000 people every year, but can be life-threatening. In the majority of cases, some type of infection precedes the syndrome, and the thinking is that the body's immune system over-reacts and starts attacking the peripheral nervous system. Generally the first symptoms are numbness, tingling and pain, followed by progressive weakness in the legs and arms. If severe, paralysis of the diaphragm can result, resulting in respiratory failure and death if treatment is delayed.

So, to your case. Since your illness was some time ago, the residual foot drop is unlikely to worsen and shouldn't interfere with your ability to dive. The same is true of your spinal disc surgery; some would legitimately argue that diving is a form of hydrotherapy that could help relieve your symptoms.

The flies in the ointment are the drugs you're taking - both can cause sedation and aren't ideal for a diver, so a depth restriction of 20m with no decompression limits is usually advised to limit potential interaction with pressure and nitrogen narcosis. Diving with an experienced buddy who knows your medical history would be prudent, too.

For more Q&As from Dr Oli, check out: **www.sportdiver.co.uk/divedoctor**

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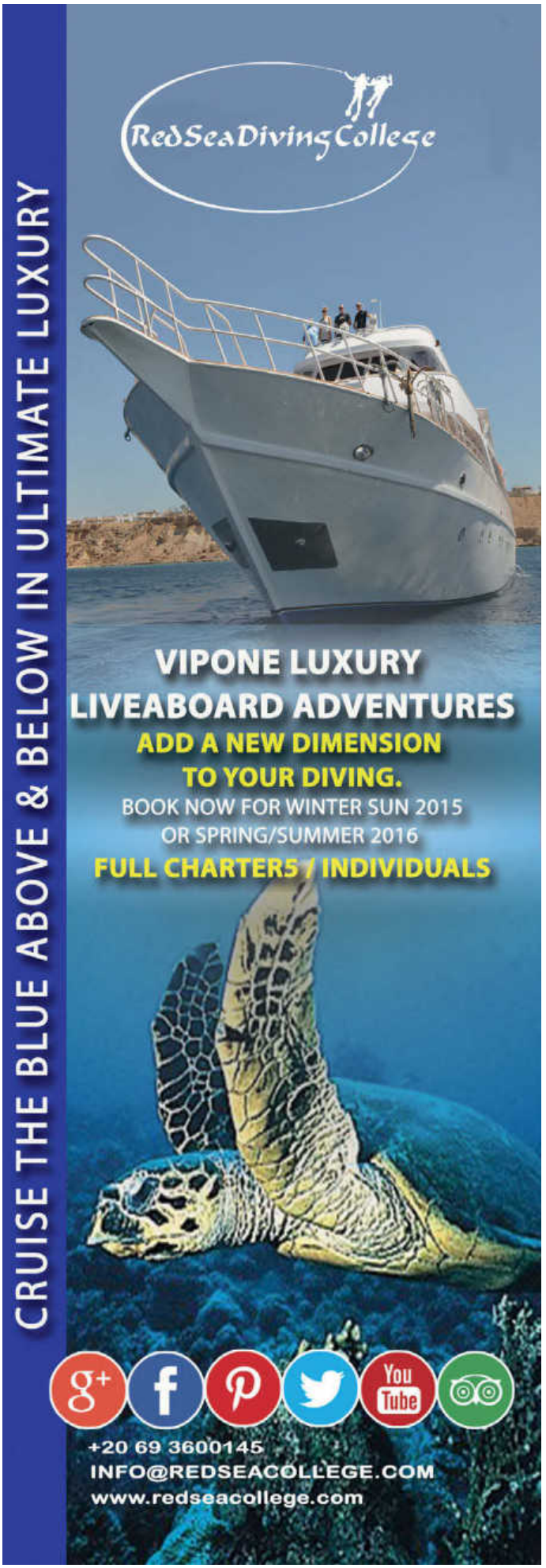

# TOP *Wreck* DIVES

The SPORT DIVER TEAM are all dedicated wreckies, so we relished compiling a list of some of the planet's top wreck dives. However, with so many world-class shipwrecks out there, working out what to include and what to leave out was no mean feat

Photographs by MARK EVANS, STUART PHILPOTT, JEREMY CUFF, DAVID JONES AND GAVIN ANDERSON

## THISTLEGORM, EGYPT

Many sunken ships get labelled with the title of 'world's best wreck', but the Thistlegorm is surely one vessel which deserves such an accolade. This 129-metre British freighter rests upright on a sandy seabed in 30m, almost totally intact, with an amazing cargo of Allied wartime supplies in its holds, including motorbikes, trucks, munitions, medical supplies and even rubber boots. She was sunk in 1941 after being bombed by German Heinkel He111s while at anchor in the Straits of Gubal. Nine of her crew perished in the attack, so it is important you treat this wreck with respect when you dive her.

The Thistlegorm then lay undisturbed until 1956, when legendary French diver Jacques-Yves Cousteau located the wreck. He found a veritable military museum packed in the holds much as it had been 15 years earlier. He took the ship's bell, the captain's safe and a motorbike, but otherwise left the great wreck as he found her.

Amazingly, she then disappeared into obscurity again, and it wasn't until the early 1990s that she was rediscovered and became a mainstay on the popular northern wreck safaris.

She is now visited by thousands of divers a year and, while she has suffered somewhat at the hands of light-fingered divers and careless mooring, she is still one of those wreck dives which will linger in your memory long after you have returned from Egypt.

The Thistlegorm is such a large wreck that it is impossible to explore her all in one dive. In fact, you could do four or five dives on her and still only scrape the surface, there is that much to see.

The upper and lower levels of hold one and two are connected and this is where you will find a car park of Bedford trucks and Morris cars. The trucks are filled with motorbikes, rubber boots and Lee Enfield rifles, and you can also find airplane wings, torpedoes and anti-tank mines. In the midships you can explore the main superstructure, which holds the bridge and the captain's cabin and bathroom (still with his tub and toilet in place, although now partially submerged in silt).

In the blast area towards the stern - the only part of the wreck which is seriously damaged - you can see upturned Bren gun carriers, and hundreds of cases of six-inch shells. While here you can swim around the anti-aircraft gun and heavy machine gun mounted on the stern.

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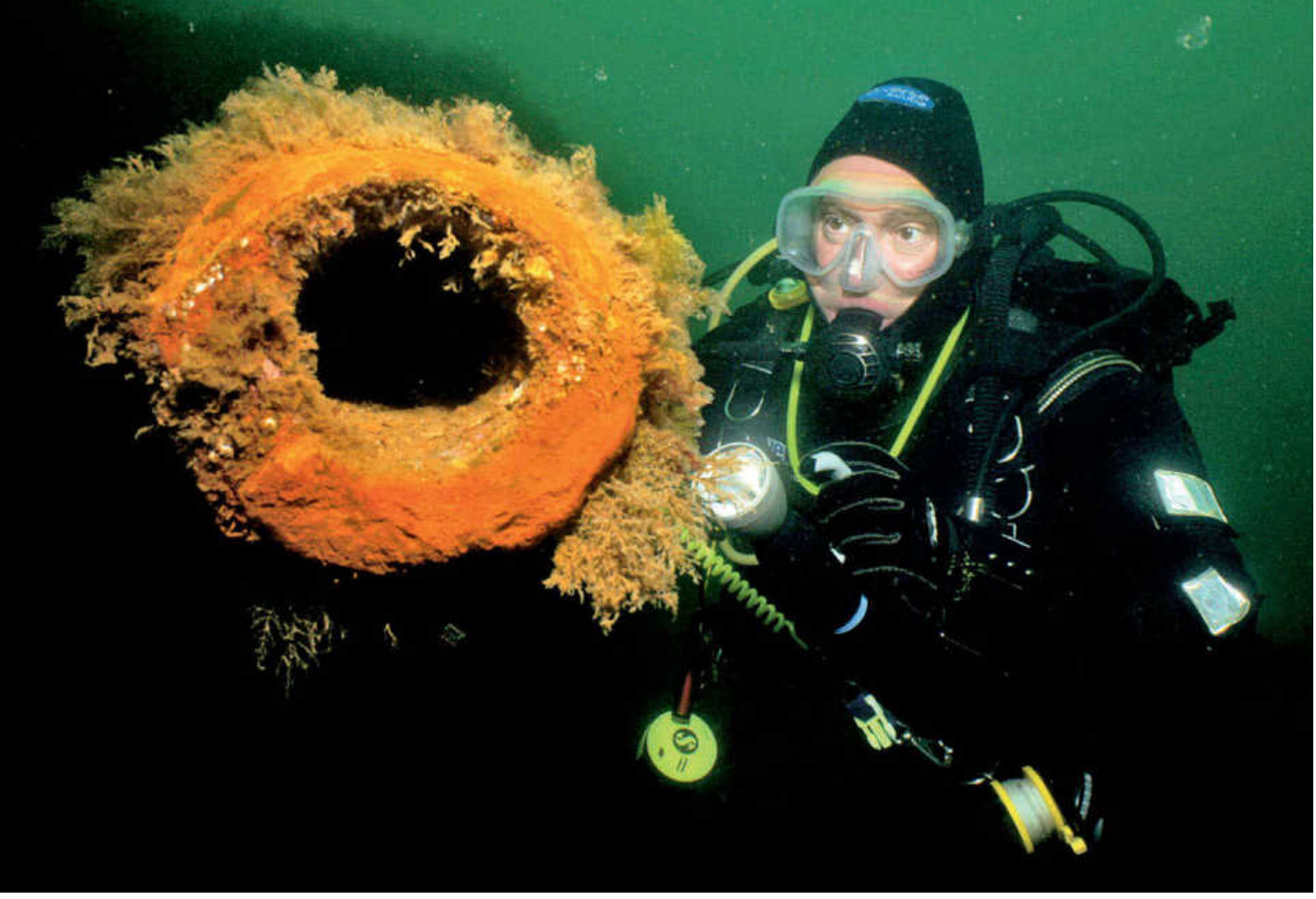

## SCAPA FLOW, SCOTLAND

Wreck divers owe a lot to Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter. If this high-ranking officer had not given the command to scuttle the entire German Imperial Navy's High Seas Fleet in World War One, Scapa Flow would just be 'another' Scottish dive site. Instead, it now boasts one of the highest concentrations of diveable wrecks in the world.

The fleet, which consisted of no fewer than 74 warships, was consigned to the bottom of the Flow on 21 June 1919. Von Reuter, wrongly believing that the Armistice negotiations had failed and hostilities were about to resume, used code flags and semaphore to order the skeleton crews manning the disarmed ships to scuttle their vessels.

As soon as the British forces realised what was happening, Royal Navy boarding parties desperately tried to save the ships from a watery grave. They managed to stop 22 of the huge vessels sinking beneath the waters of Scapa Flow, but 52 still ended up on the bottom.

Unfortunately (for us wreck divers, anyway!), there then followed what is widely regarded as the greatest marine salvage operation in history. The firm Cox and Danks started salvaging the German war wrecks in the 1920s, and this continued until 1946. During this time, they raised a total of 45 ships. They, and companies that came along after them, also carried out extensive salvage on the remainder. Divers still have some world-class wrecks to dive on, but just imagine what Scapa Flow would have been like if the whole fleet had been left 'in-situ'!

The massive 177-metre battleships Markgraf, Konig and Kronprinz Wilhelm are the 'big boys' and all lie upside down, but with the latter you can easily get underneath the upturned hull and see the giant main armament.

Slightly smaller but no less awesome are the 155-metre cruisers Coln, Dresden and Karlsruhe, and the mine-layer Brummer. These lie on their sides and are far more accessible.

Then you've got the blockships, scenic dives and other non-wartime wrecks - basically, Scapa Flow is one of the world's best wreck-diving locations.

## UM EL FAROUD, MALTA

This 110-metre-long tanker became Malta's largest artificial reef when it was sunk on 2 September 1998. She listed severely to starboard during the sinking, but eventually settled on the seabed in 35m. Over the years, the Um el Faroud has taken on the appearance of a 'proper' wreck, especially after the vessel broke in two. The superstructure is split in front of the bridge, but both sections lie close to each other, with the shallowest point 20m. Its huge holds can be explored, and other points not to miss are the imposing bow and the impressive rudder and prop, which makes a great spot for a photograph. Three years before the Um el Faroud was sunk, an explosion killed nine dockyard workers in Valetta and there is a brass plaque in their memory.

## ZENOBIA, CYPRUS

Cyprus is home to one of the largest wrecks in the Mediterranean, the 172-metre Swedish roll-on, roll-off ferry Zenobia. This monstrous vessel sank just outside Larnaca Harbour in 1980 after its computer-controlled ballast system went haywire. She was carrying a cargo that included no less than 108 trucks and articulated lorries, and these now lie where they fell when she settled on the bottom on her port side.

While this was a genuine shipwrecking, she couldn't have gone down any better for divers - the seabed is at 42m, and the highest point on the hull is 16m, meaning divers of all levels can experience a dive on her. The sheer size of the ship is daunting, and the penetration dives available are infinite, making this a must-dive for true wreckies.

## RHONE, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Of all the wrecks in the BVIs, the most famous is the Royal Mail steamship RMS Rhone, commissioned in 1865 to transport mail, passengers and goods between England and its West Indian colonies.

This 95-metre vessel came to grief in 1867, when it was caught out in open sea by the worst hurricane ever to hit the Virgin Islands and smashed on to Black Rock. The cold water hitting the red-hot boiler caused a cataclysmic explosion which blew the ship in half. The stern sank immediately, while the bow swung round, heeling over before sinking where it is still found today. Of the 147 passengers and crew onboard, 125 were swept to their deaths.

The scattered remains of the Rhone - it tends to be done in two separate dives, the deeper bow section and then the shallower stern and midships - would probably be a top dive site even if this is where the story ended, but the wreck was given the ultimate publicity boost when it was used as the primary filming location for the 1977 film The Deep. You too can pretend to be Nick Nolte or Jacqueline Bisset as you swim in and around the wreck, but don't expect to find any giant killer morays!

The bow is the largest and most-intact section of the wreck, and sits on its starboard side in 22-24m. The mast and crow's nest are still attached, as are some of the lifeboat davits, and these are now smothered in coral growth.

It is possible to swim into the hull just down from the bowsprit and you can then explore the interior before exiting at the place where the ship split in half. This is no tight squeeze; it is reminiscent of being inside a cathedral.

## OLYMPIA MARU, PHILIPPINES

Coron Bay in the Philippines is host to many World War Two wrecks, many of which were sunk on 24 September 1944 by fighters and dive bombers of the US task force 38. Some 24 Japanese supply vessels had tried to hide among the Calamianes Islands in a fruitless effort to evade attack.

One of the most-visited is the Olympia Maru (previously known as the Tangat Wreck before its identity was positively proven), a 140-metre, 5,000-tonne Japanese freighter now lying upright in 30m. It was sunk as a result of direct bomb hits from US Navy Helldivers. A direct hit on the engine caused an oil tank to explode on the port side, and additional hits took out the galley and cargo holds. Fire spread rapidly through the boat and it sank soon after the attack. It is known that at least 19 people went down with the vessel.

Thanks to the upright orientation of the ship and the wide-open cargo holds - watched over by towering cranes - it is a great wreck dive for most levels of diver.

The entire vessel is smothered in coral growth, and you can find scorpionfish, pufferfish, batfish and grouper hiding in the holds and around the superstructure.

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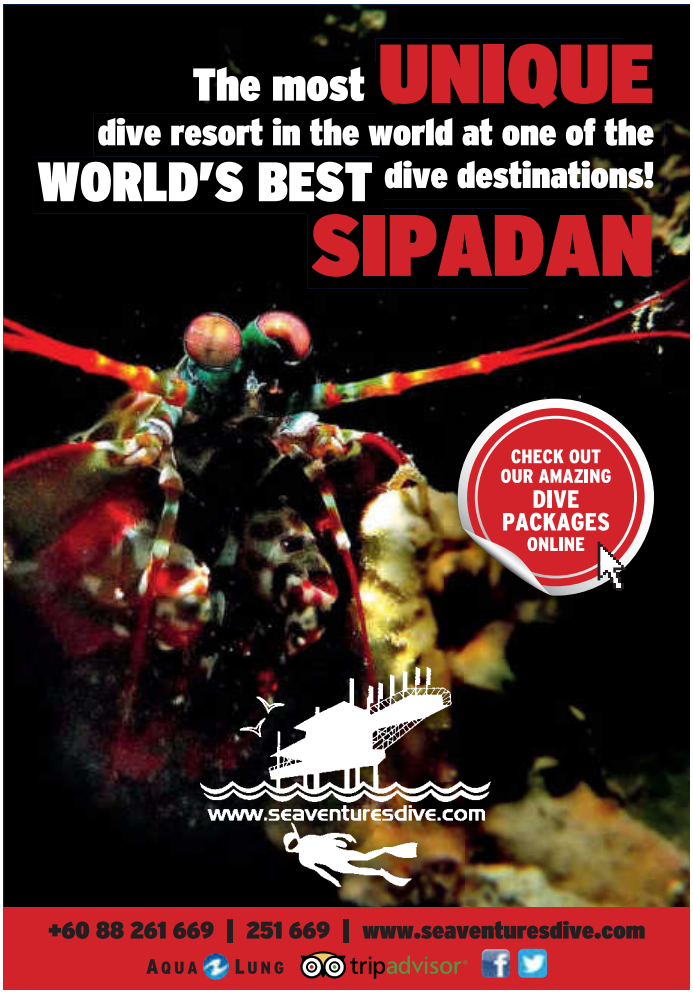


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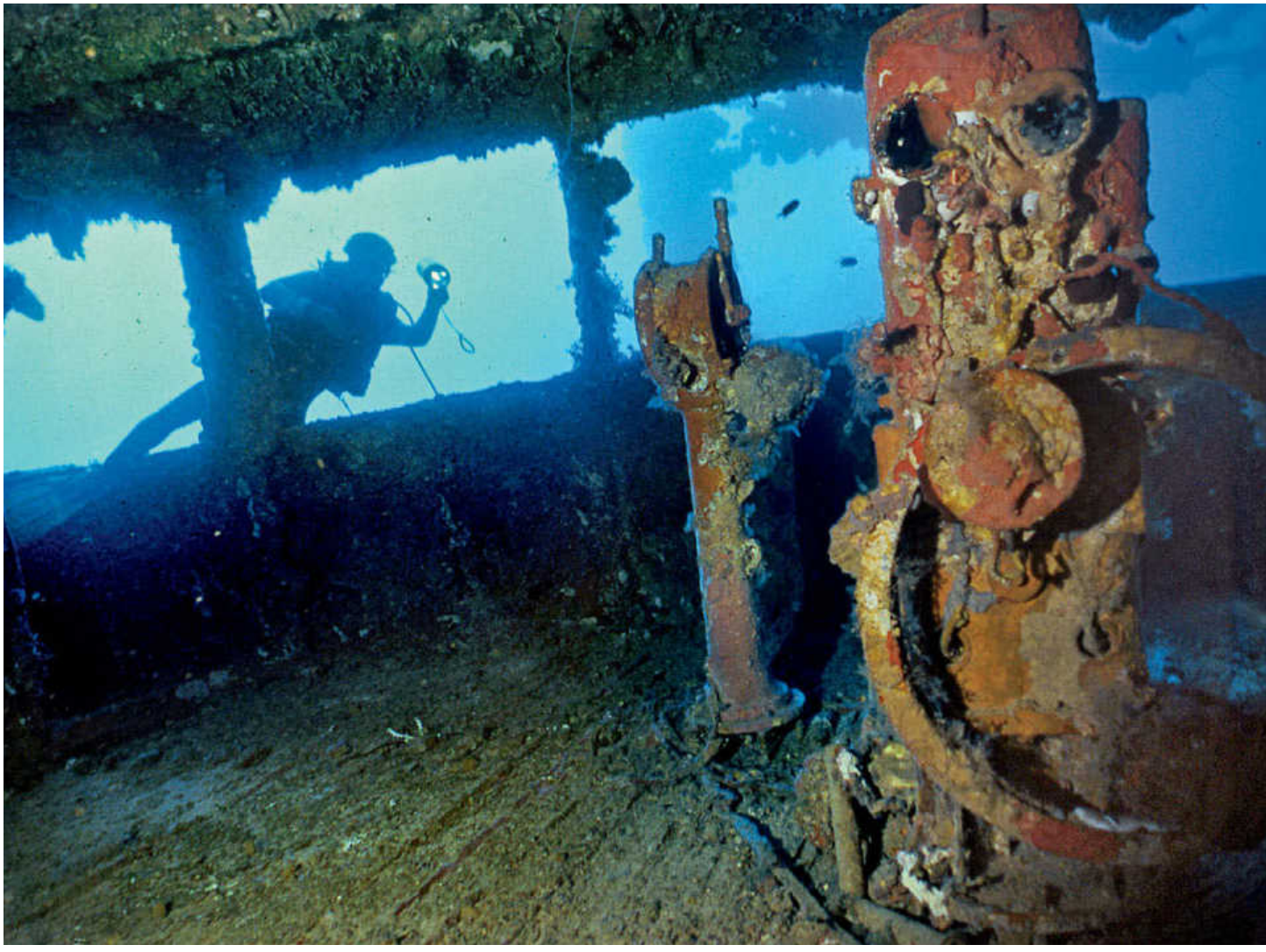


## CHUUK LAGOON

Mention Chuuk Lagoon, perhaps better known to westerners as Truk, to a wreck diver and if they're not among the few who have ventured to the remote coral atolls to dive the remains of the Japanese World War Two fleet, it's number one on their list of 'must-dive' destinations. Chuuk Lagoon is quite simply the greatest wreck-diving destination in the world. The sense of history, the size, condition and sheer number of the wrecks, coupled with the difficulty involved in travelling to Chuuk Lagoon, give the area a certain allure.

The existence of the World War Two wrecks at Chuuk Lagoon was first given prominence in a Jacques-Yves Cousteau documentary from the early 1970s called The Lagoon of Lost Ships. It secured the reputation of Chuuk Lagoon as a Mecca for wreck divers around the world.

The quality of some of these wrecks, which number more than 50 ships and around 150 airplanes, is high enough to fill a list of top ten dive sites alone. Taken as one whole destination, and Chuuk Lagoon is without equal.

The barrier reef which protects Chuuk Lagoon acts as a natural harbour, and so was seen as an ideal base for the Japanese in World War Two. The Americans saw Chuuk as a vital strategic position for an attack on Japan, and on 17-18 April 1944, the US launched wave after wave of air attacks, catching the enemy unawares, and in 48 hours has totally devastated the fleet and land defences.

Many of the wrecks in Chuuk Lagoon are at the limit of recreational diving depths, and so only suitably experienced divers tend to travel here. They are rewarded with some of the top wreck dives in the world.

The Shinkoku Maru is an enormous tanker 150 metres long and a must-see for visiting divers. This is one of the most popular and beautiful in the lagoon, while inside you'll find the galley with cooking utensils, and even the officers' bathroom.

Another wreck not to be missed is the Fujikawa Maru, a cargo ship in 34m complete with bow and stern guns. The holds contain everything from guns, shells and airplane wings to an entire fuselage. In the remains of the Yamagiri Maru lie rows of artillery shells in the fifth hold that were destined for Japanese battleships.

Genuine legendary dive destinations are few, but Chuuk Lagoon is one that justifies all the hype.

## BIANCA C, GRENADA

The Italian passenger liner Bianca C is known as the 'Titanic of the Caribbean', as it is the largest diveable wreck in the region, and it is certainly one of the most-impressive shipwrecks you will ever see anywhere around the globe.

At more than 190 metres long, it is a truly massive vessel, and it sits perfectly upright in 52m of water, with the upper deck level being around the 30-33m mark. Visibility can often hover around the 12-15 metre mark, thanks to the silt storm that the steadily disintegrating wreck is creating.

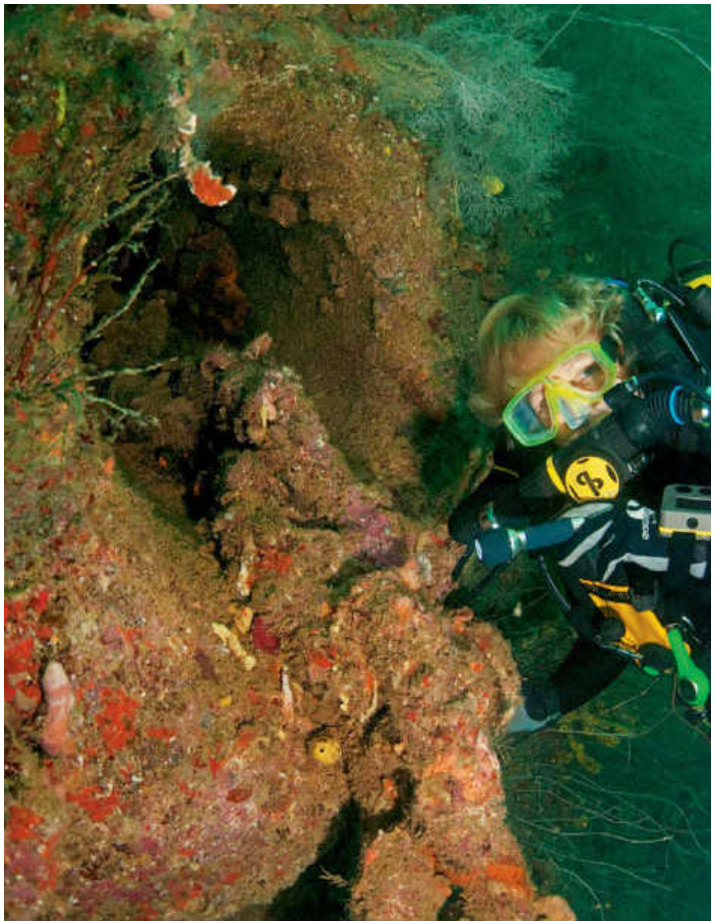
The Bianca C sank in October 1961 after catching fire and burning fiercely for three days. A massive community effort saw all the passengers and most of the crew rescued from the stricken vessel during those few days, as islanders took to the sea in all manner of craft, from fishing boats to rowing boats. Tragically, three crewmen died from the initial explosion and subsequent fire.

A British frigate, HMS Londonderry, attempted to tow the Bianca C somewhere it could be beached, but the mighty liner had other ideas and, after snapping the towline, she settled in the water and sank to her present resting place.

A sometimes strong current runs over the Bianca C from stern to bow, and so a fast descent to the shelter of her decks is required. Dropping through the greenish water, it can be rather daunting, especially when the hulk of the liner appears through the gloom.

The front two-thirds of the vessel sit upright, but the rear third is twisted over on the starboard side. It is still possible to make out one of the swimming pools, and if you look closely you can see remnants of the blue tiling. Many floors have collapsed in on themselves, and the whole wreck is smothered in a fine silt, but it is still visually mind-blowing when you consider the scale of this ship. Each way you look it vanishes into the distance, it is so enormous.

If you are suitably qualified, it is well worth dropping down to the seabed at around 50-52m and looking back up at the steep bow, which slices up a good 20 metres above you. You feel insignificant with this monstrous shape looming over you. On the seabed near the bottom of the bow, you can find one of the ship's massive anchors.



## USS ORISKANY, FLORIDA, USA

If you want to send your mind into sensory overload, pay a visit to the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Oriskany. Hovering just above the deck, at 46m, whichever way you look, the massive expanse just vanishes into the deep blue around you. Next to you will see the 'island', an impressive superstructure housing the bridge and other important rooms, which stretches eight storeys towards the surface. It is little wonder our brains can't cope with this behemoth - make no mistake, this is one seriously large shipwreck…

The Oriskany (pronounced O-risk-anny), also known as the 'Mighty O', is simply immense. Scuttled in May 2006, she settled on the seabed perfectly upright in 65m, leaving her flight deck at 42m and the top of the island in 16-18m. Since then, various storms have caused her to settle, and now the flight deck sits at 46m, with the highest points reaching 19-20m. However, while this means the flight deck is slightly beyond the accepted recreational limit, it still means that both recreational and technical divers have plenty they can get their teeth stuck into.

She is 277 metres long - that's almost the length of three football pitches! But, before you start envisaging some lengthy swims, you'll be pleased to hear that most of the diving, particularly recreational dives, centre around the island.

The two-level bridge at the front of the island and the flight bridge at the rear can be easily penetrated either through doorways or through the windows. Elsewhere, there are doorways and large cut-outs allowing access into the main structure of the island. With the vast majority you can see your exit point as soon as you venture inside, but the odd room is 'one way in, one way out' and can be quite dark, so a torch is a useful accessory to carry with you on all dives.

The Oriskany was stripped of harmful toxins prior to being sunk, and many items of interest were removed from the bridge and control rooms inside the island, but there is the odd console and control panel here and there.

One 'must-visit' spot is the top of the escalator. Yes, that's right, an escalator, exactly the same as those in a shopping centre. The Oriskany was one of the first carriers to be fitted with such a unit to make it faster for pilots and aircrew to get from the hangar deck to the flight deck. The bottom of the escalator lies below 55m, but the top sits at 45m inside the bottom level of the island.

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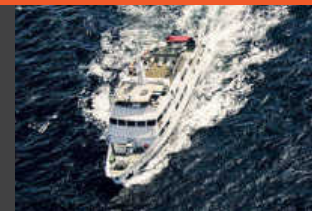

## SS YONGALA, AUSTRALIA

The wreck of the SS Yongala is one of those iconic dives, often listed as one of the top ten dives in Australia, and it deserves to be in any list of world's best wreck dives.

The wreck rests on a sandy expanse 28m down, with the shallowest part of the wreck at 14m. There's no reef shelter nearby and the area can be subject to heavy swells if the wind is up. Currents can also be strong and can affect the way you dive the wreck.

The visibility around the wreck is rarely crystal clear, but can vary tremendously. Even from dive to dive, you can expect significantly changed visibility. Prepare yourself to be blown away by the amount of life that has colonised this wreck. You'll see more species of coral and fish than on most reefs. Everything is in profusion, abundance, or even superabundance. And big, too!

In fact, the marine life is so spectacular that many divers pay little attention to the wreck itself. Back on board, you'll often hear talk turn to turtles, rays and oversized grouper instead of the wreck's many features.

The wreck is festooned with an incredible array of hard and soft corals, and anemones, and is home to huge populations of baitfish. These countless hordes provide food for huge numbers of fish such as snapper and batfish, which attracts even bigger predators.

Raiding schools of jacks, gigantic Maori wrasse and grouper rampage over the wreck on feeding sprees, gorging on the almost-endless supply of food. Turtles are seen on most dives, and are quite tolerant of divers. In the darker recesses of the wreck, giant Queensland grouper skulk in the gloom.

The wreck is remarkably well-preserved considering its age, and makes for a magical dive that you could do over and over again.

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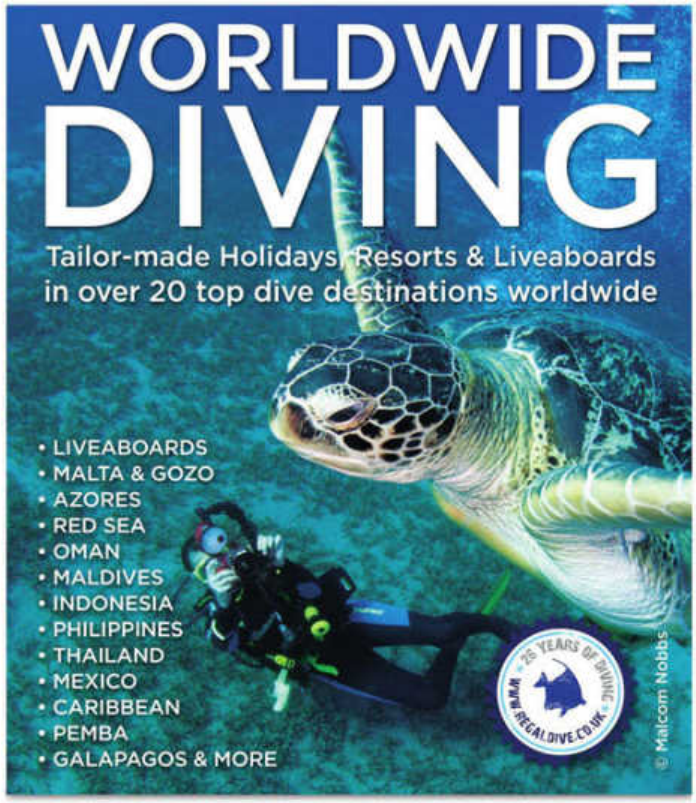


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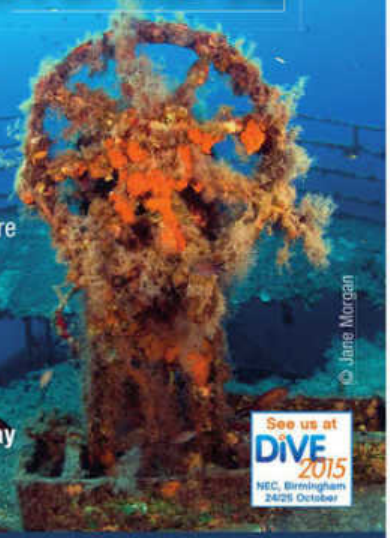


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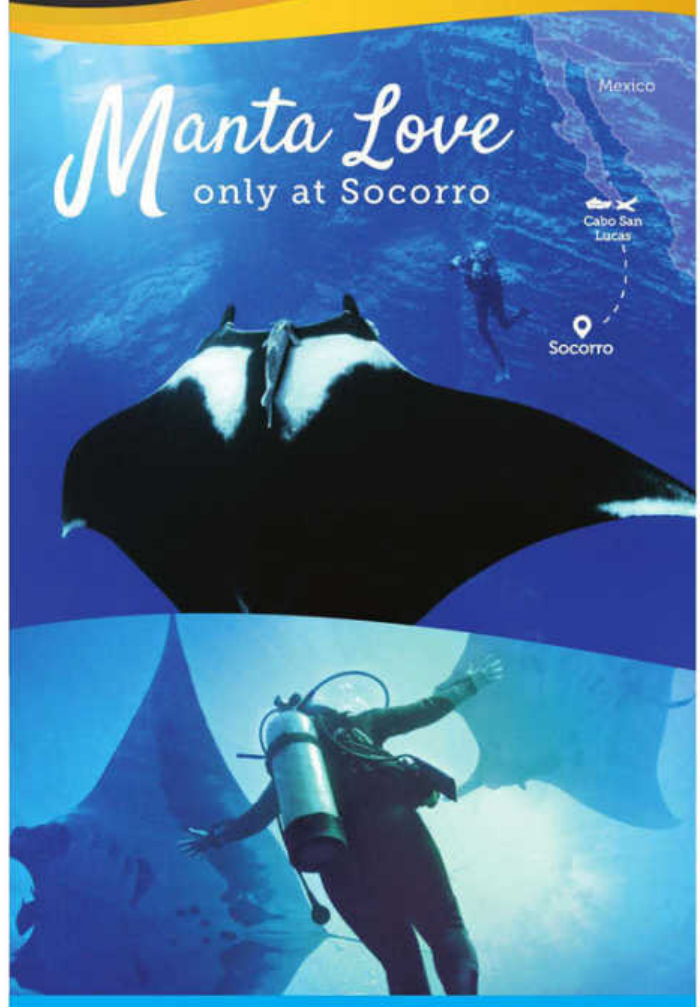




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# SIMON SAYS...

*Simon R Chance*, manager, PADI Diving Society and PADI Retailer & Resort Associations

## AMBASSADIVER BURNS

Waaaaay back in September 2013, I heard from Chris Martin - venerable leader at PADI Alpha Divers, in Larnaca, Cyprus (S-32255) - who was excited at the prospect of welcoming a young lady who was aiming to complete her PADI Rescue Diver programme with them. This event was particularly noteworthy as the lady in question not only had a vast array of dives and qualifications in her logbook, she was also just about to reach the grand old age of 12 on arrival in Cyprus which, if successful on her Rescue course, would make Charlotte Burns - for it was she - quite possibly PADI's youngest-ever Junior MSD.

Success did, indeed, follow, but Charlotte did not rest on her laurels and was recently appointed as PADI's first 'AmbassaDiver', acting as a brand ambassador and using the inspiration of her own achievements to take 'the scuba message' forward to young and old alike.

Typically, although Charlotte's role was only announced a week or so ago as I type, she has already completed her first public AmbassaDiver engagement, as a figurehead for the PADI Women's Dive Day event held at Andark Diving & Watersports. Her participation clearly struck a media chord as well, with the event receiving coverage in newspapers and on national TV.

Her next project is, typically, both ambitious and unusual, as PADI are sponsoring Charlotte for a few dives in the Silfra fissure, which involves dropping into a narrow crack between the American and Eurasian tectonic plates up in Iceland. Not that diving this geological wonder is unusual in itself - if you fancy a go, just look up Iceland in PADI's Dive Shop Locators and you're almost there! - however the dive usually has a lower age limit of 18, so in Charlotte's case special permission was required form the Icelandic government. That wasn't easy - it took Charlotte eight months of lobbying and careful explanation to achieve - however now the requisite permission is in place, the youngest-ever diver to experience Silfra's crystal-clear waters will be taking some friends along for the ride; a research film crew from Coventry University will be recording the event, and that other well-known PADI diver, Monty Halls, will be presenting with Charlotte in a documentary to teach young folk about plate tectonics.

Not bad, for a 13-year-old, I think you'll agree; I can't wait to see her plans for when she turns 14!

The PADI Diving Society has been in existence since 1997, and from humble beginnings has grown substantially, within a few years reaching heady heights of 'world's biggest diving club'. With membership now standing at over 180,000 keen, active divers across the planet, the PADI Diving Society represents a formidable 'tribe'. Now all three sectors of the PADI Diving Society - Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe, Middle East and Africa - have moved from been connected but fractured, uniting under a global banner and becoming one entity, with a unified approach and single magazine title reaching all members, everywhere. **www.padi.com/scuba-diving**

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# TOTAL SUBMERSION HITS BONAIRE

Buddy Dive in Bonaire was the host resort for this year's PADI Diving Society Total Submersion event in June. Pro-snapper Craig Dietrich was there capturing all the action, and as you can see from his photographs, a veritable 'shoal' of keen Diving Society members converged on this tiny Caribbean island for a mix of great diving, topside fun and games, swag bags galore, friendly competitions, social banter and special guests. Look out for a full report in a future issue.

Missed out on the 16th Total Submersion in 2015? Check out: **www.padi.com** for details of next year's event.

# LEADING THE WAY

Wide representation from across the UK once again this month, with the following new PADI Master Scuba Divers having been brought to our attention recently:

- **Wayne Bufton, Kington, Herefordshire**
- **Stephen Jessop, Grantham, Lincolnshire**
- **Keith Staton, Abingdon, Oxfordshire**

Although these gents come from all over England, they have something else in common besides their achievements and their love of diving; all three clearly share a passion for the East, with the Philippines and Thailand featuring heavily in their certification histories. Indeed, Stephen has taken this a step further, having recently also joined the global family of PADI Instructors just about a week before I wrote this.

If you're heading out to Pattaya, look out for someone standing just that little bit taller, and wish Stephen congratulations from us all on his great achievements - as indeed we congratulate all new PADI Master Scuba Divers, on gaining their scuba 'Black Belts'!

The prestigious Master Scuba Diver certification - the highest non-professional certification awarded by PADI - recognises a diver's mastery of personal diving skills in a minimum of five different Diver Specialty areas, as well as their ability to demonstrate dependable Rescue and Emergency Responder techniques. Not surprisingly, given our shared commitment to diving and all things aquatic, a significant number of PADI Diving Society members have either achieved this award already, or are currently working towards achieving it.

If you would like to know more about the PADI Master Scuba Diver programme, contact your local PADI Professional, or visit PADI's website: **http://tinyurl.com/PADIMasterDiver.**

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Project AWARE Foundation is a growing movement of scuba divers protecting the ocean planet - one dive at a time. Over the past two decades of underwater conservation we've learned that divers are true leaders in ocean protection. We're ocean heroes numbering in the millions across the globe. We believe together our actions will make a huge impact and will help to rescue the ocean. **www.projectaware.org**



## MY OCEAN **NEWS**

*Domino Albert*, Communications Manager

Sharks and rays are at a substantially higher risk of extinction than most other groups of animals. One quarter of all known species of sharks, skates and rays are listed as Threatened with Extinction on the IUCN Red List™. Yet, more than 1,000 species that belong to this group play diverse, critical roles in the ocean ecosystem, are a source of food for thousands of people around the world, and provide many non-consumptive benefits to communities around the world.

In places like Palau for instance, shark diving is a major contributor to the economy and generates an estimated US$18 million per year. Despite their importance and value, sharks and rays are severely overexploited. Shark fisheries remain woefully under-regulated and overfishing, finning and bycatch continue to threaten the survival of the species. Thankfully, divers are some of sharks' closest and most-influential allies and we're working together to keep sharks and rays populations healthy.

Since 2011, when Project AWARE embraced the movement-oriented approach to tackle the two ocean challenges - marine debris and shark and rays in peril - scuba divers, like you, have helped us and our shark conservation partners secure important policy advancement for shark and ray conservation. A stronger EU shark-finning ban, historic trade protection at CITES CoP16, and CMS protection for migratory shark and ray species to name just a few. We hope that you'll continue to support us as we channel and redirect the overwhelming concern for sharks and rays demonstrated at such historic meetings into enforced national protections and regional limits on shark and ray catches. Stay tuned for the latest in shark conservation and put your fins on for sharks with a Finathon challenge to secure funds critical to protecting imperilled sharks and rays! The Project AWARE movement is being heard.

# OCEAN FILM FESTIVAL WORLD TOUR RETURNS TO THE UK

UK audiences will be able to immerse themselves in the wonders of the ocean without getting their feet wet as the Ocean Film Festival World Tour returns to UK theatres this autumn after a highly successful first tour in 2014. The festival, which originates in Australia, will feature a brand-new selection of the world's most-captivating ocean-themed short films and will be shown in 24 towns and cities across the UK.

"We thoroughly enjoyed the Ocean Film Festival Australia earlier this year so we're really excited to have another opportunity to be a conservation partner of this awe-inspiring film festival," says Domino Albert, Project AWARE Communications Manager. "The Ocean Film Festival World Tour is a unique event not to be missed, which inspire people to further explore, respect, enjoy and protect our ocean."

Designed to mesmerise and enthral, the Ocean Film Festival World Tour showcases more than two hours of sublime footage taken above and below the water's surface. The films document the beauty and power of the ocean, and celebrate the divers, surfers, swimmers and oceanographers who live for the sea's salt spray; who chase the crests of waves; and who marvel at the mysteries of the big blue.

Heart-stopping shots of big wave surfing and adrenalin-inducing scenes of divers swimming with white sharks will leave audiences on the edges of their seats. The films also encourage viewers to dive head first into ocean culture as the festival is filled with touching interviews and insightful narrations from the characters whose lives are inspired by the ocean.

Together with the Ocean Film Festival, Project AWARE shares a positive vision for the future of our ocean. Each of the festival's films conveys a deep respect and appreciation for the world's oceans and the creatures that call them home. A selection of 2015 highlights include:

**DEVOCEAN** - South African-born Bruno spent the majority of his life in or on the water. However, in 1998, a tragic event left him a paraplegic. In an instant, he plunged from carefree surf guide, sailor, scuba diver and traveller to the depths of despair. A chance wave and the restorative powers of the ocean showed Bruno a new path in life, one that would be rich, full, diverse and salty. Devocean is an inspirational story of life's lessons as taught by the sea.

**OCEANMINDED** - Oceanminded follows champion freediver Hanli Prinsloo along the coast of South Africa and Mozambique. Her underwater journey takes her into the realm of the ocean's most-feared predator - the shark. The often-feared creatures are portrayed in a very different light, one of beauty and respect. It's an adventure full of risks and passions - on one breath!

The 2015 UK Ocean Film Festival World Tour will donate 25p from every ticket sold to Project AWARE and Surfers Against Sewage (SAS). "We are very pleased to be working in partnership with both charities and hope the tour will raise awareness of the essential work undertaken by these organisations, while at the same time, raising valuable funds to continue their work," commented Nell Teasdale, Director, Ocean Film Festival UK Tour.

Tickets are on sale now. To find out more about the festival, to view the trailer and to book tickets, visit: **www.oceanfilmfestival.co.uk.**

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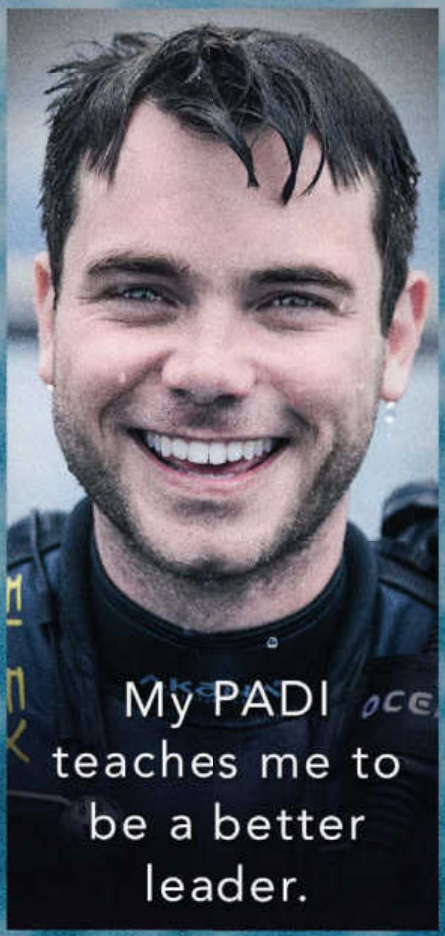


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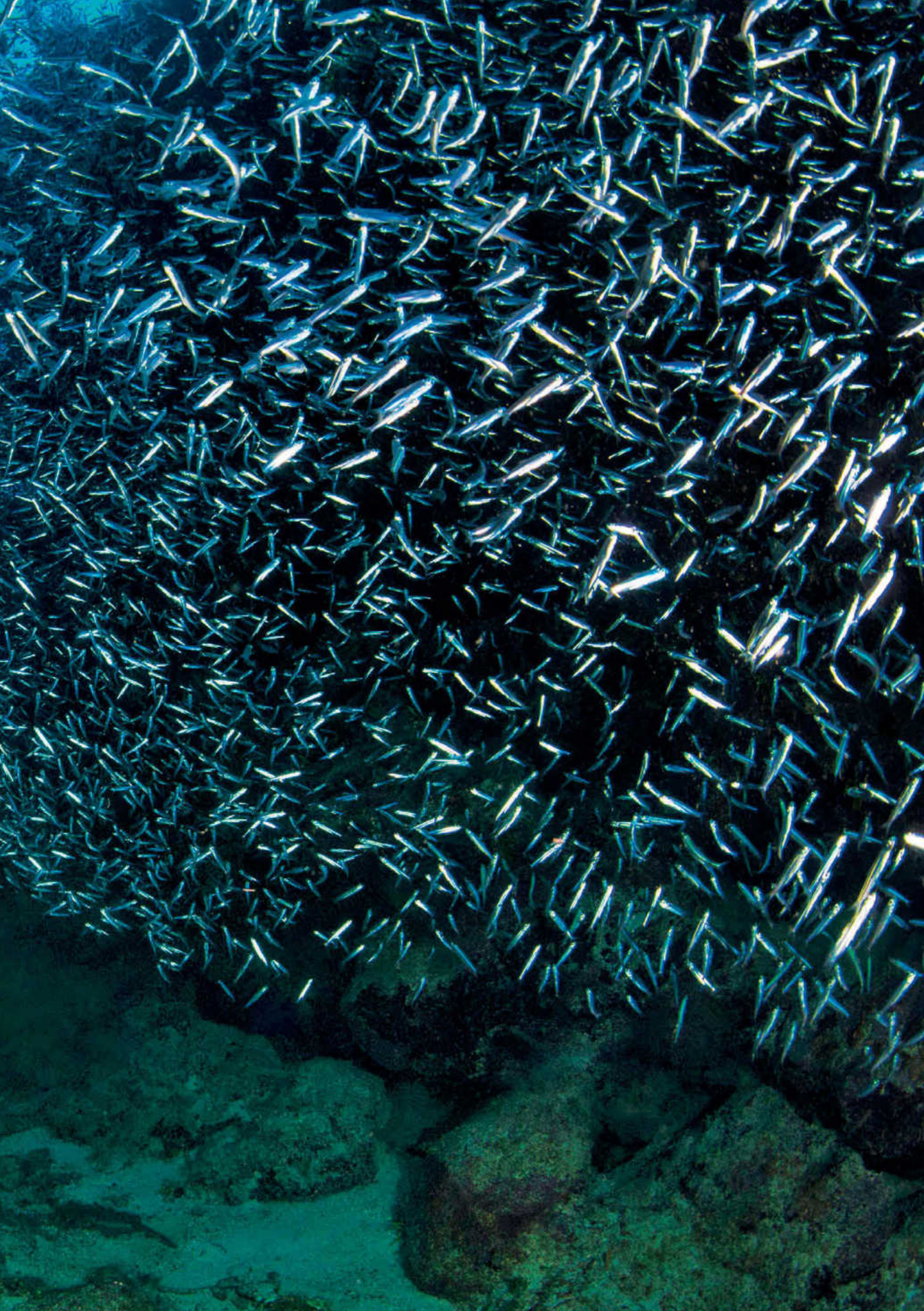
# Beyond the BLUE HOLE

The Blue Hole is always seen as the jewel in the crown of Belize diving, but STUART PHILPOTT was keen to see what else this Central American country had to offer visiting divers

Photographs by **STUART PHILPOTT**



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Nurse shark mayhem

The 'great' Blue Hole, as it is often called, has to be the most popular dive site in Belize. But I soon discovered that the former British colony isn't just a one-site wonder. There are some 200 palm-fringed cayes scattered around the second biggest barrier reef in the world. The 300km coral reef stretches from Mexico in the north down to Honduras in the south. Marine life encounters are typically Caribbean from shoals of French grunts to the odd patrolling grey reef shark. But at certain times of the year there are spectacular spawning aggregations. In December and January, thousands of Nassau grouper come together around Ambergris Caye, and between April and June, huge schools of snapper congregate in the southern cayes which, in turn, attracts a large contingent of whalesharks. There are even guaranteed manatee encounters.

I had arranged a 12-day trip visiting a number of different locations, hotels and dive centres along the way. Initially I would be travelling north to San Pedro on Ambergris Caye and then five days later fly south to Placencia and Hatchet Caye for whalesharks. Fingers and toes crossed there was a good chance of finding manatees in both of these areas. The last two days would be spent at Mariposa Lodge in the jungle at San Ignacio to experience zip lining, cave tubing and visit the Mayan ruins.

There are no direct flights to Belize from the UK. The most-popular routes are via the US or Mexico. I chose the cheapest option, which required an overnight stopover in Miami. After a nine-and-a-half hour flight, I wasn't looking to do any sightseeing tours, so the in-airport Sheraton made perfect sense (five minutes transfer). On the return leg I only had to wait a few hours for my connecting flight back to the UK, so a hotel wasn't necessary.

At Belize City I transferred to a cosy ten-seater twin turbo prop aircraft for a short 20-minute (50 mile) domestic flight to San Pedro on Ambergris Caye. I had booked into Ramon's Village Resort, which is one of the biggest and best dive resorts on the island. My thatched Tahitian-styled cabana was an excellent standard and had everything I could possibly want to make my stay comfortable, including air-con and fridge. I found a supermarket just five minutes' walk from the resort so I could conveniently stock up with soft drinks and snacks. There was also an on-site bar, beach, pool, restaurant and dive centre. Strange, but the bar only served beer, not wine or cocktails.

I had already visited the Blue Hole dive sites at Dahab in Egypt and on Gozo in Malta, but the 300-metre-diameter, 124m-deep Belizean Blue Hole was supposedly the big daddy of them all, as well as being a 'true' blue hole. Jacques Yves Cousteau had rated it one of the top ten dives in the world and it was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986. With so many commendations, I was obviously keen to visit. I spoke with Rick Sutherland, the dive centre manager at Ramon's, and he said that there was a trip going out the very next morning - a 5.30am start! This slightly dampened my enthusiasm but not enough to cancel. The Blue Hole is approximately 70 kilometres offshore, so the boat journey is about three hours each way. Usually the sea conditions are flat calm, but the curse of the Philpott had struck yet again - I had chosen a cloudy, raining, lumpy sea day. Oh lucky me!

Rick gave us a comprehensive briefing before the dive. He explained that the Blue Hole had once been a huge cave before collapsing. The best features were the massive stalactite formations located around the perimeter at a depth of 40m. The stalactites turned out to be the only

***"On my first attempt I didn't see any whalesharks but I did come across a shoal of around 1,000 snapper being hunted by a pod of bottlenose dolphins"***

Massive fish shoals are common

feature worth seeing. A lone reef shark came in for a closer look, but otherwise there was very little flora or fauna of interest. To be honest, I was a tad disappointed - the Blue Hole just turned out to be another tick on my 'seen it, done it' list. But I only had time for one dive, so maybe there were other more interesting spots?

The second and third dives at Half Moon Caye and Long Caye were far more enjoyable. The deep wall at Half Moon Caye was swathed in colourful soft corals. Curious reef sharks came within touching distance. I also had a close run in with a green turtle. The 14-metre dive boat docked at the caye for lunch, which gave everyone a chance to see the colony of red boobies. Even the third dive called Aquarium lived up to its name, with shoals of grunts, snapper and spadefish. During peak season, Ramon's runs Blue Hole trips four to five times a week.

Over the next few days I managed to sample about a quarter of San Pedro's 50 odd dive sites. I saw nurse sharks and turtles on just about every dive. I also visited two other dive centres, Ecologic Divers and Chuck and Rob's. At Chuck and Rob's they laid on an intense nurse shark dive. The dive guide brought along a container full of fish pieces which made the nurse sharks come even closer. At one point I had two to three metre long nurse sharks lying over my legs while I was taking pictures!

A snorkelling boat had taken some close-up video footage of manatees at a dive site further south near Caye Caulker. Rick had managed to drum up enough interest for a boat trip but we spent a fruitless two hours searching the reef. I caught sight of a huge squadron of spotted eagle rays but not a whiff of a manatee. As a consolation, we stopped at the Hol Chan marine reserve, which surprisingly turned out to be a great diving and snorkelling site. The shallow channel (8-10m) was jam-packed full of marine life. There were huge shoals of grunts and snapper. Big fish sightings included eagle rays, southern stingrays, nurse sharks and turtles. The only slight negative was the number of snorkelers splashing about on the surface.

Like all of the Caribbean, Belize has a serious problem with lionfish. The dive guides, equipped with hand spears, openly kill this invasive predator and then feed them to the local reef inhabitants, which in this case seemed to be the nurse sharks. But I'm sure this is changing their natural behavioural patterns. Nurse sharks normally lie on the seabed or are found wedged head first underneath a ledge. In Belize they are patrolling freely in the open and literally coming straight at you! And not in ones and twos, at some sites in packs of up to 20! This is great news for photographers, especially if they want close ups, but I'm not sure if associating divers with a free feed is a healthy idea. At other dive sites I noticed

Nurse sharks patrol the reefs

Loggerhead comes in for a close up

that the reef sharks were also coming in uncomfortably close.

My next stop was Hatchet Caye resort some 120km south. I flew back to Belize City and then transferred to another ten-seater plane bound for Placencia. This was followed by an hour-and-a-half boat ride (30km offshore) to my final destination, Hatchet Caye. I arrived a day after the full moon, which meant perfect conditions for whaleshark encounters. Between April and June, thousands of snapper congregate around Gladden Spit Marine Reserve to spawn, which happens to correspond with the full moon cycle. This in turn attracts a large concentration of whalesharks that feed on the spawn. When I spoke to Sean Faux, the manager of Pirate Reef Divers, he said they hadn't seen any whalesharks for the past few days, which didn't bode well for my three-day window of opportunity.

The 12.5-metre dive boat was full to capacity in readiness for the morning whaleshark excursion. Sean explained that we would be blue water diving, which is basically drifting along in the blue at a depth of around 20m waiting for a whaleshark to appear - or not, as the case may be. On my first attempt I didn't see any whalesharks but I did come across a shoal of around 1,000 snapper being hunted by a pod of bottlenose dolphins. It was fascinating to watch the dolphins sweeping in and out of the shoal picking off the stragglers. My second and third attempt was just as fruitless, but I did have a close encounter with a leatherback turtle. It just appeared out of the blue and bumped into my camera dome port! There were a lot of disappointed divers, but hey, that's nature for you.

Hatchet Caye Resort is a 30,000 sq metre, privately owned island. There are 12 luxury rooms in all, with a choice of either main house rooms or ocean front cabanas. In some ways this classy resort reminded me of an island in the Maldives. Most of the activity is focused around the main complex, which houses the restaurant, bar and swimming pool. The

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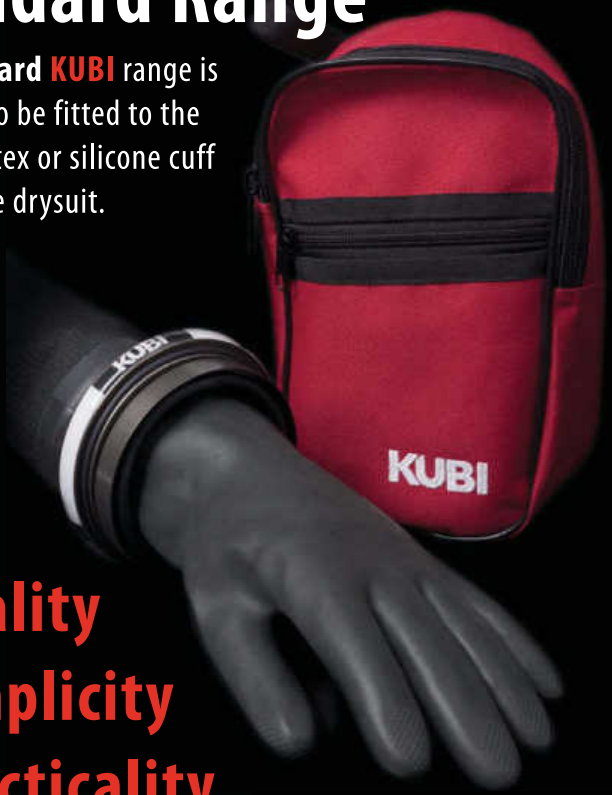


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The nurse sharks are not shy

Massive stingray relaxing on the seabed

majority of guests are divers and snorkelers so there's no guessing what the main topic of conversation is about.

During my stay Sean invited me along on a lionfish hunt. Glen didn't beat his previous record of 72 kills in one dive, but we did manage a respectable 52. Most of the fish are given to the restaurant, so lionfish dishes are available for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

In between my whaleshark blue water dives I managed to explore some of the local sites, including Pompion Wall and the Turtle Spot. At Pompion Wall I came across a friendly free swimming moray and an equally friendly hawksbill turtle. In fact, most of the marine life I encountered wasn't camera shy. Even the Nassau grouper followed me throughout the entire dive. Maybe living inside a marine reserve has its benefits? At the Turtle Spot the guides fed some of our lionfish catch to the local marine life. By now I was getting 'bored' of so many nurse sharks, horse-eye jacks and stingrays, but the giant loggerhead turtle was something different. This turned out to be a superb 5m diving and snorkelling site.

I managed to extend my stay at Hatchet Caye by two nights so I could keep looking for whalesharks. I saw more dolphins, snapper and clouds of spawn, but sadly the biggest fish in the ocean eluded me. My apologies to Mariposa Lodge for cancelling, I'm sure that the zip lining and cave tubing would have been a lot of fun.

To fill up my last non-diving day I booked on a manatee tour. I had been told the Belizean manatees were a protected species, so I was more than surprised when I heard that Norwegian Cruise Lines had been given permission to build a $50 million cruise ship terminal at Harvest Caye, which happens to be where the manatees are seen. Unfortunately the blustery weather had silted out the entire area. The guide said the underwater visibility was normally at least 20 metres, which is just typical. We cruised around Harvest Caye for a good two hours but most of the activity was coming from the island's construction site. Then a mother and calf appeared right by the boat. They were moving quite fast so I only got a brief glimpse, but at least I wouldn't go away empty handed! ■

***"I had already visited the Blue Hole dive sites at Dahab in Egypt and on Gozo in Malta, but the 300-metre-diameter, 124m-deep Belizean Blue Hole was supposedly the big daddy of them all"***

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
## BELIZE

### WHERE IS IT
Belize is in Central America, bordered by Mexico to the north, and Guatemala to the south and west.

### HOW TO GET THERE
There are no direct flights to Belize from the UK. One of the most-convenient routes is to fly into a hub airport in the USA, such as Miami, and then catch a connecting flight to Belize.

### WHEN TO VISIT
You can dive Belize all year round, but the rainy season falls between June and November. The coldest month is January, while the highest temperatures are experienced during May.

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS
A valid passport with at least six months left to expiry.

### CURRENCY
Belize dollar (£1 = BZD3.13).

### WHERE TO EAT AND MEET
In the resort towns, there are always a selection of bars and restaurants serving a variety of cuisine, from local seafood to North American fare.

### VERDICT
Belize has a rich Colonial heritage and the world's second largest barrier reef on its doorstep, making it an intriguing place for divers and non-divers alike.

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wakatobi uncovered

# SHOOTING THE SMALL STUFF

## Building macro photography skills can yield memorable rewards

Photographs by Marco Fierli

When you're drifting weightless on the lip of a massive coral wall, it's easy to be wowed the grand vistas. But for many photographers who visit Wakatobi, it's not the big picture that holds their ongoing interest. Instead, they prefer to focus in on the small details.

Underwater macro photography can be rewarding at many levels. With the right equipment and some basic instruction, a novice can create memorable images in fairly short order. At the other end of the spectrum, some veteran macro shooters devote entire dive trips to capturing that one perfect portrait of a rare or elusive species.

It's possible to take close-ups of fish and other small reef dwellers with a point-and-shoot camera, but most photographers soon reach the limits of these systems' capabilities, and invest in a housed camera system. If budget is an issue, search the web for used equipment. Serious, well-heeled shooters may upgrade their equipment not because it is obsolete, but simply because something newer and fancier came out. This gives the savvy second-hand buyer a chance to acquire a cost-effective system that was heralded as state-of-the art just a few years ago. Another option available at Wakatobi is a rental programme that provides guests with access to high-end Seacam housings and Canon 5D camera systems.

Mirrorless cameras with interchangeable lenses can produce some fine macro work, but DSLRs are still the favourite. Likewise, a macro-capable zoom lens might do the trick, but you are better off investing in a prime lens. If you are shooting with a cropped sensor camera, a 50 or 60mm lens will get you close to a one-to-one image ratio, while a full-frame camera will require a 100 to 105mm lens for the same results.

For the even-smaller stuff, adding a macro converter with a magnifying capacity of +5 to +10 will bring tinier creatures - size of a grain of rice subjects like a popcorn shrimp or pygmy seahorses - in enough to fill the entire frame. Going the route of super macro opens a world few can even imagine.

For lighting two strobes is better, but one can also do the job. TTL metering works will with macro, and a shutter speed of 180/second will eliminate subject movement and camera shake. Strobes should be set to three quarter to full power, which allows for an aperture range from f8 to f22 for greater depth of field - something that can be critical when shooting a tiny subject where a half-inch of camera movement could spoil the shot. There's no need to worry about balancing ambient light, as these settings will most often render the surrounding waters black, and bring full attention to the subject.

For the best lighting, strobes should be aimed at or slightly behind the subject. Aiming too far forward will create backscatter. If using a single strobe, it should be positioned above and slightly off to the right or left of the subject. With dual strobes, you can get more creative. Setting both to the same power with equal aim at the subjects will eliminate shadows, while varying power and position can create some interesting modeling effects.

Another critical component of successful macro shooting is your own physical movements. Moving close to a small subject nestled in a frag-

## EXPERT ADVICE

Whether you're new to underwater photography or an experienced shooter, you can benefit from the guidance and expertise of Wakatobi's photo pro, Marco Fierli.

An accomplished photographer, Marco shares his talents through private sessions and workshops based on individual need and experience. These can range from one-day refreshers to four-day comprehensive workshops. For more information on photography workshops, or to arrange a session during your stay, please send an email to: **office@wakatobi.com**

ile setting requires excellent buoyancy and body control. If you are new to macro, it's best to practice manipulating the camera and approaching small subjects in a forgiving environment such as a pool or an open water site with a rock or sand-bottom that can't be easily disturbed.

One trick veteran macro shooters use is to carry a muck stick - a baton-like device that can be placed carefully in the substrate to act as a first point of contact and a stabilising anchor. It can also be used to push off and away once the shot is completed. At Wakatobi, macro shooters have an additional option. Here, dive guides are often employed as 'human tripods', taking hold of a photographer to help control body movement as they move close to the reef.

Whatever strategy you employ, keep in mind that no shot is worth damaging the reef or traumatising a subject. As you become more comfortable with close-quarters photography, you may discover that the process of capturing a special image is every bit as rewarding as the end product. ■

# RED SEA *Explorer*

After multiple dives in cold British waters, MARK EVANS finally got the Hollis Explorer Sport Rebreather into warmer surroundings in Egypt - and it proved a revelation

Photographs by PAUL 'HOOCH' WINKWORTH AND MARK EVANS

EXPLORER
TransPac

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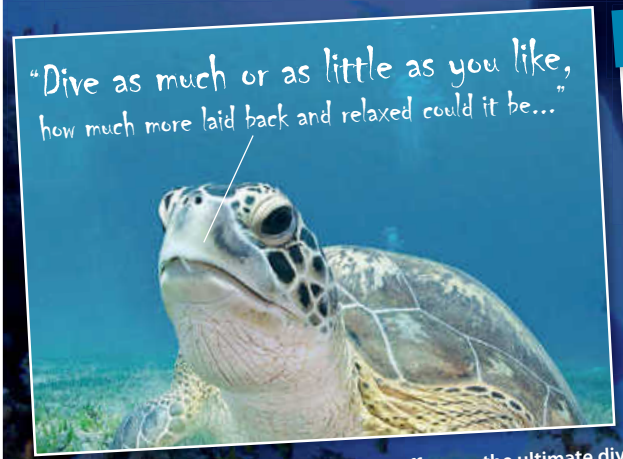
"Dive as much or as little as you like, how much more laid back and relaxed could it be..."



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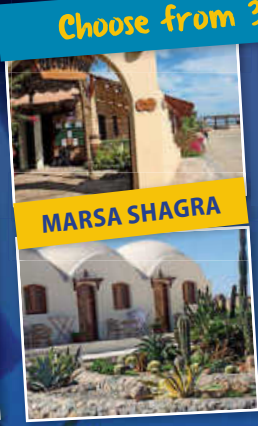
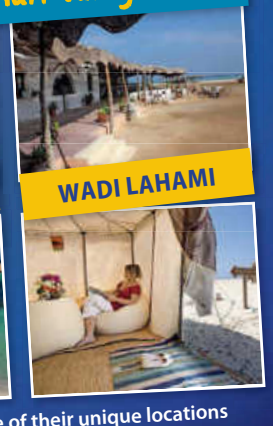


MARSA SHAGRA

MARSA NAKARI



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egypt where it all begins

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"Okay, I'll admit it, rebreather divers can get closer to marine life than open circuit divers!" said Red Sea dive guide extraordinaire Paul 'Hooch' Winkworth. We'd just been for a dive on the legendary Shark and Yolanda Reefs on the very tip of the Sinai Peninsula and I'd had an extremely close encounter with a large Napoleon wrasse. And when I say close, I mean close - if I had moved my head just a couple of inches to the left as it swam by, I would have headbutted it! This up close and personal face-off just cemented my view that warm, tropical waters are the true home of the Hollis Explorer, where it literally transformed dives I had done innumerable times before on open circuit.

Kitted up in the Explorer and ready to go diving

***Red Sea Diving College***

*The Red Sea Diving College is one of the longest-established dive centres on the Sinai Peninsula, and is located right on the promenade in Na'ama Bay. An imposing courtyard is entered through a large archway, and here you can find all the usual amenities - rinse tanks, kitting-up tables, store rooms, bathroom facilities, etc.*

*The College runs daily dive boats out to the local reefs, Ras Mohammed Marine Park and the Tiran reefs of Gordon, Thomas, Jackson and Woodhouse, as well as the wrecks of the Dunraven and the Thistlegorm. It also offers all levels of PADI dive courses up to Instructor, and through the technical division, PURE, can cater for all tech-diving requirements.*

***www.redseacollege.com***

Loading up the scrubber

Dropping down on to a local reef site

## HEADING FOR THE BLUE

A week of full-on diving in Scapa Flow (see the August issue of Sport Diver) saw me knocking on the door of 40 hours on the Hollis Explorer, but so far all of my diving had been confined to the UK, so that meant donning drysuit, gloves, hood, additional weight, etc. I felt that I was really getting to grips with our Long Term Test unit, but couldn't wait to take it for a spin in warmer waters where I felt that it would be able to shine and show off its true capabilities.

The Red Sea seemed the obvious warm-water dive destination, particularly as July sees the Ras Mohammed Marine Park become flooded with vast shoals of fish, including batfish, unicornfish, snapper, barracuda and jacks - and what better way to test a rebreather than to head into the midst of what is essentially 'fish soup'.

A few phone calls later and it was set - I was going to be diving with Red Sea Diving College, and staying at the Iberotel Lido in Na'ama Bay (handily located right next to the dive boat jetty). To show how user-friendly the Explorer is, I decided to take our LTT unit with me - without a cylinder and with an empty scrubber, and fitted with a small travel wing, it weighs less than 9kg, so is extremely travel-friendly. All you need to source when you arrive at your chosen destination is a five-litre dumpy tank and a tub of sofnalime. To make maximum use of the space in my dive bag, I even stuffed the inside of the rebreather case with T-shirts!

Now in an ideal world, rebreather divers would dive with rebreather divers, to enable you to get the most out of the extended dive times that this technology allows, but for this trip I was diving with Hooch, who was on open circuit. Now thankfully he is very good on his gas usage, so we were still able to stay down for more than an hour on most dives, and while he was swapping his 11-litre aluminium cylinder between dives as normal, I just took off the eSCR and let it go to 'sleep'. When it came time for the second dive of the day, I just turned it back on and, depending on

***Iberotel Lido***

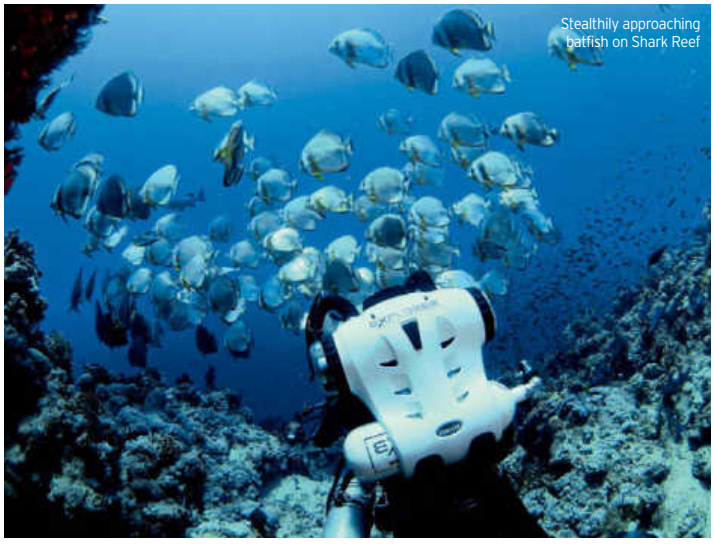
*The Iberotel Lido is the ideal home base for daily divers, being located literally a stone's throw from the Na'ama Bay jetty - sitting having breakfast on the open-air terrace, you can watch the morning chaos as the arriving dayboats jostle for position, and then wander round the corner just minutes before you have to rendezvous with your dive guide and fellow guests.*

*The rooms are all well-appointed, with decent-sized balconies, comfortable beds, and spacious bathrooms with powerful showers. There are multiple terraces on which to relax or enjoy a drink, and all offer fantastic views across the whole of Na'ama Bay, and you have a choice of bars and restaurants for grabbing a quick snack or enjoying a full evening meal.*

***wwww.iberotel.de/en.html***

Inside the Dunraven shipwreck

Mark moves in close to the shoaling anthias



Stealthily approaching batfish on Shark Reef

the time elapsed, it either allowed me to go straight back to 'dive mode', or I had to run through the pre-dive checks again, which with the CO2 sensor fitted, were done in a matter of minutes.

Revealing the true capability of the Explorer in warm water, where the underwater topography allows you to really multi-level dive back to the surface, even after two hour-plus dives, the handset was still showing more than 45 minutes of scrubber life remaining. So if you are out on a dayboat, you can rest safe in the knowledge that once up and running, with the Explorer you can either do a two-hour-plus duration dive if all of your team are on rebreathers - and the boat schedule allows - or rack up two one-hour dives and you won't have to do a thing with the unit till you get back to the dock on an evening.

Even then, all I ever did was take the LSU back to my hotel room on a daily basis and put it on charge - it can actually run several days from one charge, but I always like to go in with it fully charged - and every couple of days give the counterlungs and the breathing loop a rinse out with freshwater and leave to air dry.

The other handy thing about the Explorer's compact size was that once it was fully built up and ready to go, it comfortably sat in one of the crates that Red Sea dive centres give you for your dive kit, so having it transported from boat to boat was no issue, and while travelling to and from dive sites you knew that it was safe and secure and wasn't going to be rolling around the dive deck if the weather turned a bit rough.

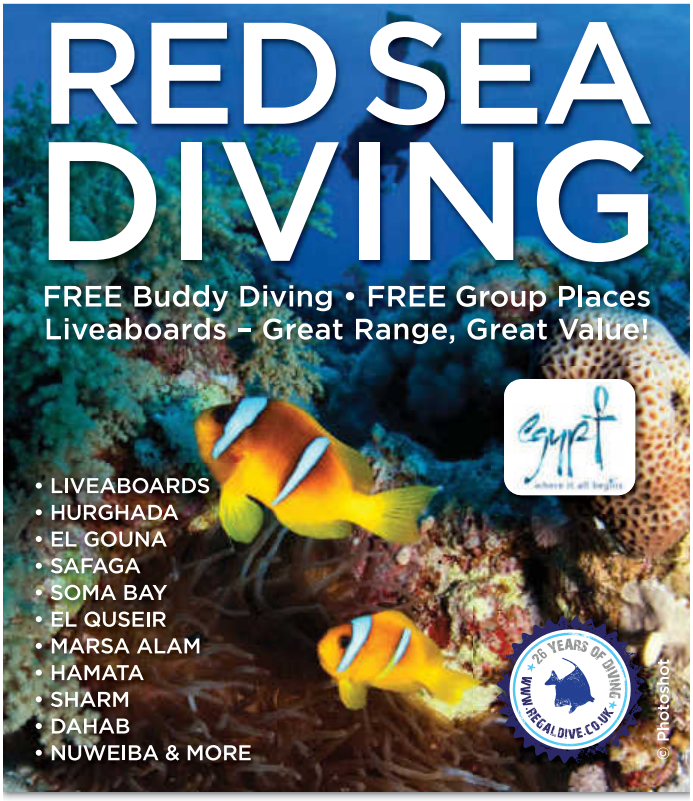
## HELLO, LITTLE FISHY

So, we've established that the Explorer will operate perfectly from dayboats, and that it offers significantly extended dive times over normal open-circuit equipment, but what about the marine life encounters with the lack of bubbles?

Being an eSCR, the Explorer does vent a fine stream of bubbles from the back of the casing periodically, so it isn't quite as bubble-free as a fully closed-circuit rebreather, but it is still substantially more silent than open-circuit kit, which means you can get mighty close to all those colourful denizens of the deep.

As well as the aforementioned encounter with a Napoleon, I was also able to get incredibly close to crocodilefish, moray eels, lionfish and even humble anthias - hanging close to the reef and being enveloped in a bright orange cloud of tiny fish is simply stunning. With it being in-season, many of our dives were off Shark Reef and Yolanda Reef (the wreck the reef is named after was actually Jolanda, but both spellings are widely used in Sinai dive centres), and so I was able to stealthily infiltrate the massive shoals hanging in the blue off the abyssal wall. With the unicornfish in particular, I was right in their midst, just inches off their tails. In fact, I was so close, it made it difficult to compose photographs!

***"With the unicornfish in particular, I was right in their midst, just inches off their tails. In fact, I was so close, it made it difficult to compose photographs!"***

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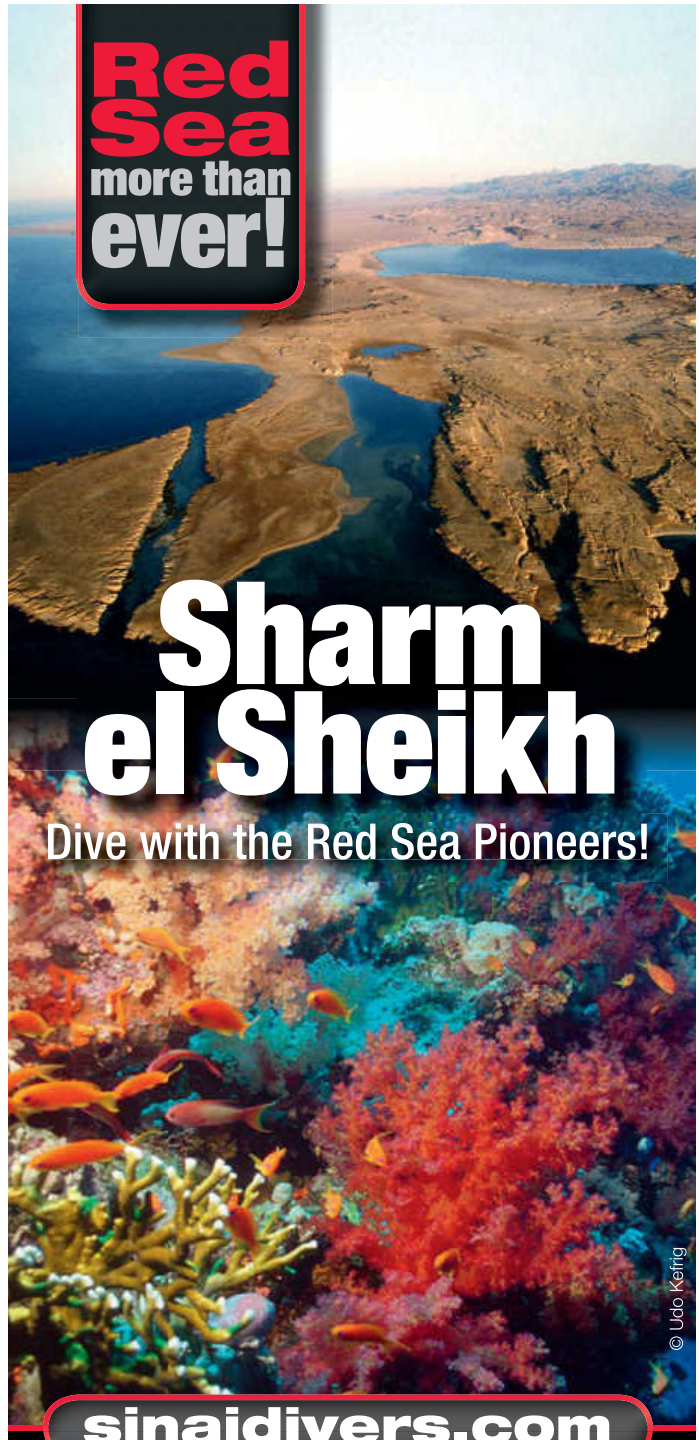


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Massive moray on the Emperor Fraser

Hanging out above the stern of the Dunraven

Mark and the huge shoal of snapper on Shark Reef

Chilling out with the fishes

***"This up close and personal face-off just cemented my view that warm, tropical waters are the true home of the Hollis Explorer, where it literally transformed dives I had done innumerable times before on open circuit"***

Talking of photography, that is another area where rebreathers come into their own. Once you have mastered your buoyancy in an eSCR or CCR, holding position for the perfect picture suddenly becomes that much easier, as your breathing makes absolutely no difference to your buoyancy. I could slowly approach for a shot, get into position and then just hang there motionless, breathing away, until the ideal moment to hit the shutter release. It does take some getting used to, though - my instinct kept kicking in to glide in on the approach and then pause my breathing while I took the shot.

## CONCLUSION

We proved that the Hollis Explorer can handle full-on British diving up in Scapa Flow, but it undoubtedly comes into its own when you take it into the tropics. The scrubber material works so much better in warmer conditions, and the unit itself is a joy to dive in just a wetsuit. You still need to wear more lead than you would with normal open-circuit gear, but we are only talking an extra 3-4kg. And the rebreather is compact and light enough that you can easily travel with it without caning your weight allowance.

I had some near encounters with marine life in Scotland, but it was only when I got into the Red Sea that it became apparent just how close you can approach fish when you are on a rebreather. It really is an eye-opener, and it is easy to see why many of the documentaries we see on TV are now filmed by divers equipped with CCRs. ■

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# LETTERS

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STAR LETTER

## A tale of inspiration

Hello,

I'm not much of a letter writer, but just had to send something in this month having read Stuart Philpott's 'Meeting Manthos' article in the August issue of the magazine. I have always enjoyed stories regarding human endeavour and people pushing limits, and Manthos' story was both fascinating and inspiring.
I have been diving for eight or nine years now and, having travelled the world and dived with all manner of people, I have shared several boats with disabled divers, from divers who returned to the sport following a life-altering accident to military personnel who used diving as a way of dealing with the physical and mental effects of conflict.
Manthos' dedication and commitment to his diving - culminating in becoming the world's first ever physically challenged Magalodon rebreather instructor - is a story from which we can all take heart. Thank you for sharing it with us and well done Manthos - inspiring stuff.

**Jan Cunningham, via email**

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# Freediving fan

Hi there,

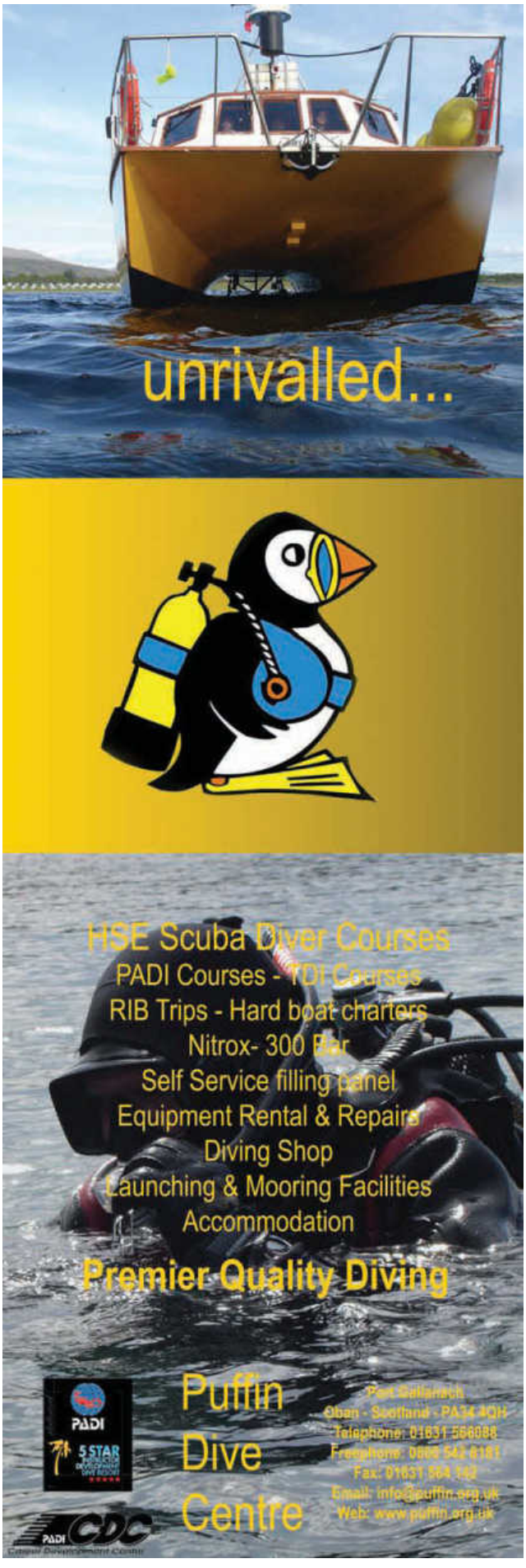
I just wanted to let you know of my experience with Gary Gainsbury at Blue Island Divers in Antiparos and the PADI Freedive Speciality course. A few weeks ago I was on holiday on the Greek Island of Antiparos and near to where I was staying was Blue Island Divers, where my wife and I have completed a number of courses over the last 13 years. We have dived with them on many occasions doing some fabulous sites, including caves and the wreck of the Samina ferry that went down in September 2000. I was eager to dive with them again whilst on holiday and even dropped in before getting to our accommodation! This is when I found out the Gary had just completed his freediving Instructor course and his passion for this area of diving really inspired me to have a go - it seems I was his guinea pig!

The course was really good. He explained everything in detail on the theory side and his calm manner gave me further inspiration, which I must admit I needed as I was getting second thoughts about it! The next morning we went to a hotel pool for the static breath-hold and once again, his calm, patient but enthusiastic manner worked it's magic and after a number of attempts he soon had me holding my breath far longer than I imagined I could!

The 40-metre swim in a calm, clear bay was next but early on I was having difficulty with my wetsuit due to the front zip fastening, which resulted in trapped air in the back that dragged me to the surface when I came to a slight rise in the seabed. Again, Gary patiently made alterations to the route but finally gave me his rear fastening wetsuit that released the air. The added comfort and neutral buoyancy gave me the ability to complete this section as well. The only disappointment was when my wife tried a static breath-hold in the water and promptly nearly beat my pool attempt first try!

Finally, THE DIVE! Unfortunately, the weather turned very - no, I mean VERY windy - and with our onward island travel timetable there was little option but to attempt this last section in not-so-calm waters, even though Gary painstakingly cruised around in his RIB to select as calm a spot as possible. I do realise that we had no option but to complete this course in poor conditions - or miss our onward travel arrangements - and once again Gary calmly and patiently helped me in this section. His calm, patient enthusiasm certainly inspired me and I can only once again thank him and Blue Island Divers for all their help. I cannot recommend them enough and thank PADI for a great introduction to freediving. My wallet is now feeling a bit lighter having bought a pair of freediving fins!

**Peter Braddock, via email**



# Watching the DETECTIVES

PADI's new Wreck Detective Distinctive Specialty gives divers the skills and knowledge to unlock the mysteries of your favourite wreck. SPORT DIVER was there to join the lust for rust...

Photographs by JASON BROWN

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How well do you know your bitts from your bowsprit? Could you tell the difference between a capstan and a chock, or are you still struggling to tell the bow from the stern of your favourite shipwreck? Until recent years, the limit of my knowledge was locating the 'pointy bit' and 'blunt bit' at opposite ends!

So why should we care that we're not quite as au fait with the finer points of ship design and construction as perhaps we could be? Well, let's consider your average wreck dive. How many times have you ever dropped down onto a wreck only to spend most of the dive swimming around not knowing what you were actually looking at? The odd recognisable object might appear - a boiler, maybe an anchor and so on - but for most of us, wrecks are nothing more than unfathomable piles of rusty metal.

Now imagine how much more you'd get out of that same dive if you could identify key parts of the ship - suddenly you'd be able to work out where you were on the wreck, follow visual clues to other key components and maybe even gain a better understanding of the ship's age, purpose and maybe even the story behind her sinking. That 'unfathomable pile of rusty metal' would be a lot easier to navigate and maybe just a little bit more interesting…

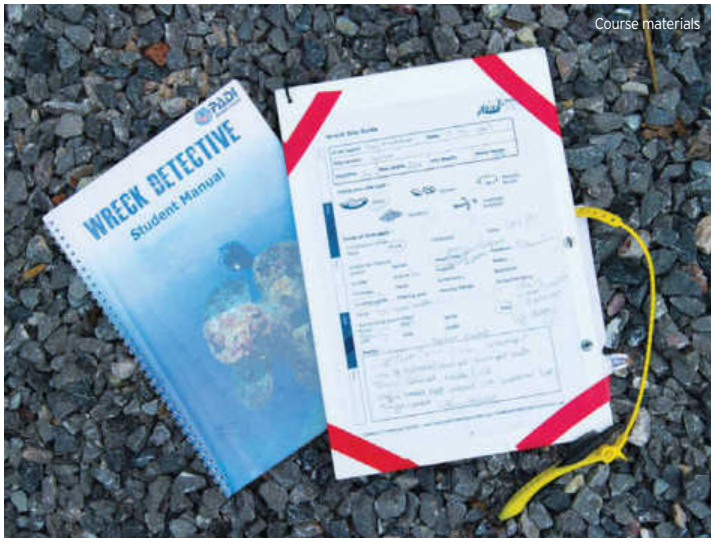
This, then, is where PADI's new Wreck Detective Distinctive Specialty course comes in. If you're the sort of diver that wants to gain a better appreciation of the wrecks you dive and the 'story' that every wreck has to tell, this new one-day course could be for you. This new Distinctive Specialty course from PADI and the Nautical Archaeology Society gives you the skills and knowledge to better appreciate the rich maritime heritage that we, as divers, are fortunate enough to visit.

So what inspired the NAS and PADI to create this new course? We put that question to Rachel Quick, Training Officer for the NAS. She said: "The inspiration came from the many divers who come to us and say 'we really enjoy diving and looking at wrecks, but we have no idea what exactly it is that we are looking at'. The desire from divers to understand more about the wrecks they dive is really what inspired us to write this course.

"Both ourselves and PADI felt there was a gap in the market for a course that expanded on the PADI Wreck Diver course. The essential difference between this course and the Wreck Diver Speciality is that the focus is on the features of the wreck and the story it might be able to tell. The course looks at the common features which are found on different types of wreck sites and how identifying them can help to identify a wreck or uncover its story."

Several years in the making, Sport Diver was lucky enough to join a group of five budding wreck detectives on the very first course run for the benefit of 'real' divers. Under the guidance of PADI Course Director Dale Spree of Weymouth-based Fathom & Blues, our enthusiastic group arrived at a sunny Vobster Quay for a full-on day of training.

We asked PADI diver Kayleigh Relf what drew her to the course and what she hoped to get out of it. "I've always been absolutely fascinated with wrecks. Why? It's simple... they capture a historic and precise moment in time. Wreck diving is not simply about looking at huge lumps of metal - wrecks actually tell a story. My first liveaboard in Egypt gave me my first real taste of wreck diving - after diving the Thistlegorm, Giannis D, Carnatic and the Dunraven, I was completely hooked!"



Course materials

Dale Spree delivers one of the lectures

Getting to grips with the course slate...

...and tape measures

*"The desire from divers to understand more about the wrecks they dive is really what inspired us to write this course"*
***Rachel Quick, Training Officer for the NAS***

Conducting a detailed survey of the wreck

*"If you love the combination of diving and history, the PADI Wreck Detective course is not to be missed. You will be amazed by how much you can spot and identify on a wreck you may have dived hundreds of times before"*
***Kayleigh Relf, newly-qualified PADI Wreck Detective***

After completing the PADI Wreck Detective course, I'm hoping that my upcoming trip to the Thistlegorm will be more of an eye opener than my first. I'm sure that my next wreck dive will be a whole new diving experience!" With introductions made, it was time to get started. While the course places an emphasis on diving, there's a lot more to being a wreck detective than simply finning around your favourite wreck pointing out key features to an impressed dive buddy. After the obligatory coffee and paperwork, the group settled in for the theory portion of the course.

A key part of the course theory covers the main features of metal, wooden and composite shipwrecks that aid in both identifying the type of wreck and its age - from anchors and armaments to main ships fasteners, ballast, cargo and, of course, the hull itself. Thankfully the content isn't too heavy, striking a good balance between introducing the subject matter without getting too bogged down in detail. For those of us without a background in marine engineering, a healthy selection of colour photos and diagrams aids the learning process.

Should you be lucky enough to dive a wreck that is yet to be identified, the course provides a good overview of how you might go about revealing its identity. So-called 'key identifiers' are the 'holy grail' of shipwreck identification - these all-important features provide a direct piece of evidence that would aid you in establishing the identity of any mystery wreck. The classic example would be the ship's bell - find this and you're well on your way to solving the mystery. Other useful sources to aid shipwreck research and identification are covered too - from local and national archives, historical newspapers and insurance companies to museums and, of course, the internet, there's a wealth of information out there just waiting to be discovered.

One of the core skills covered on the course is how to create a 'site sketch' of a wreck site. A site sketch can help you to understand the extent and layout of a site. It can also help to identify features and points of interest that you may want to investigate later. Site sketches typically include five key elements: an approximate outline of the site, the position of any large features (a boiler, for example), the orientation and approximate size of the wreck site and, of course, the depth of the seabed and key parts of the wreck. Armed with all this information - and an oversized slate - our group was ready to hit the waters of Vobster Quay to prepare a site sketch of the less-than-mysterious Jacquin II, a wooden wreck sunk in the lake as an attraction for visiting divers. While uncovering her identity wasn't going to pose too much of a challenge for our new-found detective skills, the Jacquin would provide a perfect opportunity to practise what we'd learnt.

For dive one, each buddy pair set off around the wreck noting key information on the 'wreck site guide' slate. Every wreck poses deeper questions but at this stage, our questions were limited to establishing an overview of the wreck site. First and foremost, we needed to establish the state of the wreck - is she intact, broken up, partially buried, a skeleton or are we just looking at scattered artefacts? And what is the wreck made of? Wood? Metal? Or perhaps composite materials? All these 'clues' would better help us in our detective work.

The next step was to note key features. Working with such an intact wreck as the Jacquin II made this quite straightforward, but it's easy to overlook details that could be essential later. Look closely and the Jacquin II gives up two important facts about her true identify that could so easily be overlooked: written across the stern in large lettering is both her name and her port of registration. While older wrecks may not give up their secrets quite so easily, looking for these key identifiers is a worthwhile exercise.

Utilising the information that we'd gathered on dive one, dive two would focus on creating our wreck sketches. Mapping an intact wreck like the Jacquin II is certainly a lot easier than, say, a much older wreck that is broken up but the techniques are essentially the same. Each buddy team slowly swam the full length of the wreck, noting the positions of key features to build up a picture of the wreck site. For more precise mapping, measurements can be taken in a number of ways - using a tape measure, a knotted distance line or even fin kicks. While detailed survey work is a little beyond the scope of the course, the lessons learned prepare you well for future, more in-depth training through the NAS.

With our site sketches all but complete and the obligatory knowledge reviews checked, all that remained was to compare notes on what we'd achieved. Thankfully there were no nasty surprises, with each buddy team's wreck sketches looking vaguely similar. Even on this short dive, it was surprising how much detail each pair had managed to include - everything from hand rails, chocks and cleats to port holes and even a rear gate on the aft deck made it into most of the sketches, proof positive that, like the wreck itself, the training had clearly sunk in.

Firmly targeted as an introductory course, the PADI Wreck Detective Specialty not only provides a solid foundation for further training but also makes wreck diving a lot more fun. With this training under their weight belts, all the participants demonstrated a far greater level of awareness, understanding and appreciation of wrecks and the stories that they can tell. ■

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# TALES FROM THE TANK

By MATT MARTIN, DIVE OFFICER, BLUE PLANET AQUARIUM

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AT BLUE PLANET AQUARIUM

Blue Planet Aquarium has numerous ongoing research projects, conducted onsite by our army of volunteers led by Tom Fielding, our freshwater aquarist and volunteer co-ordinating officer, and David Wolfenden, our curator and marine research guru.

The dive team likes to get involved where possible and go do the fun elements of researching. Over the last couple of years we have got involved in a number of interesting projects.

We have fostered a relationship with Liverpool University and in the last two academic years have helped graduate students set up and research our feeding methodology for the sand tiger sharks. The sharks' behaviour has been recorded and analysed, to give us a better understanding of the dynamics of the group. The research projects are now in the process of being sent for peer-reviewed publication in a scientific journal, something the whole team can be proud of.

Last year we also carried out the very simple task of collecting water samples for a shark research team from the Salford University Zoological Department. The samples were used to see if the research team could identify our species DNA in the water, measure it and use it as a baseline for future marine policy regarding shark conservation and management.

Ultimately, Blue Planet Aquarium is a commercial visitor attraction, but the opportunity and scope for research and assistance in research is vast. Please feel free to email us with enquiries we may be able to aid you with. ■

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# MALAPASCUA *Macro*

Famous for its thresher sharks, the island of Malapascua also offers a great deal for macro lovers, says **DAVID JONES**

Photographs by **DAVID JONES**

Malapascua Island in the Philippines has been on my 'bucket list' since 2003 when I first saw a BBC documentary called Smart Sharks. They highlighted the thresher shark and Malapascua Island was the one place where you were virtually guaranteed to see them. I had a window of opportunity so I booked a ten-day package with British-owned and managed Thresher Shark Divers. With that name I assumed shark sightings would be a given, so I packed my wide-angle lens and headed east. And although I was after the thresher sharks, I also threw in a macro lens and flat port, just in case. Well, you never know, do you!

Getting to Malapascua via Hong Kong and Cebu is a bit of a trek, but I was sure it was all going to be worth it. The initial briefing at the dive centre informed us that they ran four dives a day, but if you wanted to see thresher sharks you needed to be on the first dive, which left at the rather ungodly hour of 5am. Jumping onto a dive boat before the sun was even up was a bit of a shock to the system, but if you wanted to see the threshers that was the time to go. After a short boat journey we joined a couple more boats at Monad Shoal and jumped into the water. Hovering quietly at 25m, we stared into the blue and every morning they would appear, enormous tails scything through the water in a menacing, but incredibly beautiful arc, pausing briefly at the Monad Shoal cleaning station for the fish equivalent of a morning wash before disappearing again into the depths. Decompression times seemed to arrive quickly on these dives and we were soon heading back for breakfast.

These early morning excursions were repeated several times and on every occasion we saw threshers, even the odd manta. It was an incredible experience and something I can thoroughly recommend. Ah, I hear you say, there is a 'but'…

Well, when I went to Malapascua, I had intended to write about that experience. It would have been extremely easy to wax lyrical about the threshers, but I'm not going to. The reason is that I was blown away by the amazing macro life that is abundant around this island. I had no idea.

My introduction to 'Macro Malapscua' actually occurred on day one during our compulsory check dive at Bak Haw. We dropped onto brown mud and sand interspersed with algae and weed. I proved that I could

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Scorpionfish

Crustaceans of all shapes and sizes

still clear my mask after 36 years, the kit was working fine, jetlag cobwebs had been blown away and the Tokina 10-17mm lens was ready to roll. There was nothing to photograph, but then I wasn't expecting it. Suddenly the guide was getting my attention by gently tapping the side of his cylinder with a small metal rod. In the mud just in front of him was a pair of sea moths walking along the bottom. To the right of them, two seahorses, one brown and one yellow, posed gracefully on the weed. With a keen eye, the guide swept across the seabed showing us one strange creature after another - a black frogfish nestled onto some urban debris, zebra crabs hidden away in the spines of sea urchins. At the end of that first 60 minutes I was mesmerised by the sheer amount of strange and wonderful macro life I had seen.

The daily programme quickly developed - early start, wide-angle lens, the anticipation of thresher sharks and mantas, then back for breakfast before breaking out the macro lens for some weird stuff. The threshers were amazing, but without wishing to sound blasé about it, after a few days I kind of knew what I was going to get on those crack-of-dawn trips. The macro, however, just continued to get better and better. At the end of each day the guides would ask us what we wanted to do the following day, so we pretty much gave them a 'wish list' of those animals we wanted to see. The next day they would find them for us. If pygmy seahorses were the order of the day, we simply had to drop in on Bugtong Bato, or Deep Rock, but before we did the guides would also ask if we preferred yellow or pink seahorses! When I asked if they could find me a frogfish I was asked if I had any specific colour in mind!

*"With a keen eye, the guide swept across the seabed showing us one strange creature after another - a black frogfish nestled onto some urban debris, zebra crabs hidden away in the spines of sea urchins…"*

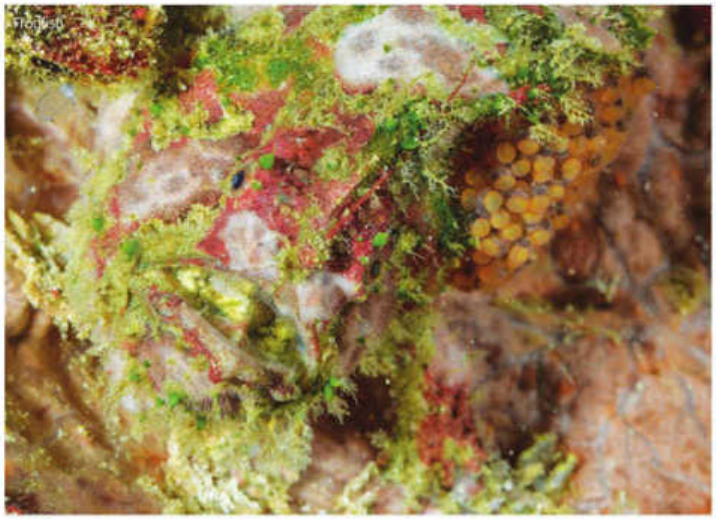
Frogfish

Cuttlefish

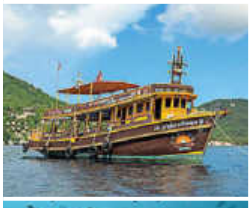
Seahorse

Nudibranch

Nudibranch


Frogfish

*"Settling onto a small patch of sand as the light fades, these elusive fish start to appear … swimming around each other in a sort of choreographed dance"*



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Seahorse

Sunset

Mandarinfish

There is plenty of diving around the island to keep you entertained, but further afield a daytrip to Gato Island (well worth the small extra cost) provided another whole range of marine life. Here I saw more cuttlefish and sea snakes in one dive than I had ever seen before, and it provided the opportunity to break out the 10-17mm lens again. There is a rather lovely cavern that stretches under the island from one side to the other and concludes with a regular social gathering of white-tip reef sharks resting in the exit. The daily routine evolved around getting the right lens and seeing some amazing things. Every evening the bar was full of excited chatter, compact cameras and images of the strange and wonderful.

Malapascua also offers the opportunity to see the beautiful mandarinfish. This dusk dive is a must. Settling onto a small patch of sand as the light fades, these elusive fish start to appear, at first in ones and twos, but eventually several will come out from their hideaways. You can become focused on one fish, but glance around and you realise they are everywhere, swimming around each other in a sort of choreographed dance. Suddenly, when the time and light are right, the fish move on from 'flirting' to a bit of 'heavy petting' before finally rising close to the surface for what can only be described as a 'fish quickie'! Blink and you've missed it.

Malapascua took a real hammering when it was hit by Typhoon Haiyan, but it has recovered well. The island has no roads and no cars; everything is moved around on motorbikes - including divers on occasions! Without the hubbub of traffic this really is a wonderful place to relax as well as do some superb diving. If you want to see thresher sharks this is the place to go; just remember to take your macro lens too.. ■

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
## MALAPASCUA, PHILIPPINES

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### HOW TO GET THERE
We flew into Cebu via Hong Kong on Cathay Pacific as it was the shortest duration. You can also get there via Manila on Philippine Airlines, or by going through Singapore and using a Silkair flight for the connection.

### WHEN TO VISIT
You can dive Malapascua all year round. Typhoon season is officially from July to October, but can extend outside of this window. During the summer you tend to get the best visibility and it is also the holiday 'low season', so prices tend to be lower.

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS
You need a valid passport with six months left on it. An exit tax is payable on departure.

### CURRENCY
Philippine peso (£1 = PHP70).

### WHERE TO EAT AND MEET
Malapascua is a quiet island - do not expect a party atmosphere like other Philippine resorts. There is a selection of hotels and restaurants, all of which are reasonably priced.

### VERDICT
If you want to see thresher sharks, then this is the place. However, it also has a lot more to offer and don't forget your macro lens.

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# PHOTO-FUN IN THE RED SEA

Wrecks, walls and dolphins greet Danny on his first Egypt dive trip

Photographs by **DANNY COPELAND**

"Guys… GUYS… quick, get back in, get back in… GET BACK IN THE WATER!" I shouted frantically, trying not to guzzle a mouthful of seawater as I bobbed up and down at the back of the boat. My new diving buddies, still peeling off their dripping wetsuits, turned back to look at me with confusion and concern. "Danny… you okay? What's the matter?" With my snorkel already in my mouth, I managed to blurt out one final word before shooting below the waves. "DOLPHINS!"

Since last month's column, I've been taking a short hiatus from my European diving adventures to spend five weeks in Egypt - the land of sand, sun, and silly amounts of shisha. To divers, Egypt is better known as a popular portal to the stunning reefs of the Red Sea. Yet these famously clear and colourful waters have somehow escaped me throughout six years of diving around the world. Well, I thought it was about time I addressed that! Thanks to the awesome team at Scuba Travel, I was invited to jump on board the MY Whirlwind for two weeks of underwater photography workshops in the north of the Red Sea, run by world-famous underwater photographer Dr Alex Mustard. I have known about Alex and have been following his incredible work for several years. Furthermore, I'd heard about his legendary workshops and how much they've helped other underwater photographers advance their skills in big ways. Needless to say, I was beyond keen to spend a fortnight learning from one of the masters of underwater imaging.

Both weeks kicked off with a few days diving and photographing the local wrecks, with a particular focus on the SS Thistlegorm. Being a fish-focused diver, I must admit that I had my initial concerns about spending so much time diving this one wreck. Surely there's only so many ways to photograph metal? Oh-ho-ho, I couldn't have been more wrong. The Thistlegorm is a truly special wreck. When it sank, it took with it a monstrous cargo of cars, trucks and bikes, many of which remain in incredible condition despite spending more than 70 years sitting on the sea floor. The result is an underwater playground for photographers that never ends! However, the real value in diving this wreck comes in the form of the challenges it forces upon you as a photographer. Many of the vehicles are nestled away in the wreck's dark, deep and claustrophobic holds, which forced us to really think about and plan how we were going to capture certain images on our dives - an exercise I'd never really experienced before.

The second half of both weeks revolved around the reefs of Ras Mohammed - particularly Shark and Yolanda Reefs, labelled by Jacques Cousteau (and Alex!) as one of the best dive sites in the world. Having dived it more than a dozen times in the past few weeks, I can easily see why. No two dives on this site are ever the same! One dive may consist of photographing an enormous and co-operative school of breeding bohar snapper while fighting an onslaught of current, while a dive the following day may involve leisurely swimming between the two pinnacles to take macro photographs of breeding boxfish. An unbelievable dive site unlike any other I've ever visited.

I'd like to thank Alex, Scuba Travel and the Tornado Fleet for an unbelievable two weeks. Photography is an extremely effective way of reconnecting people with our oceans. Great images can convey important information and stories about ocean conservation in a way that stats and scientific papers never could, while the most memorable images have the power to shift mindsets, fuel change and inspire the masses. Developing my ability to capture the awesomeness of our oceans is a major objective for my Scholarship year and for my future goals. Aside from experiencing some incredible diving (and yes, a once-in-a-lifetime encounter swimming with bottlenose dolphins), the last two weeks have been invaluable. I learnt an enormous amount on this trip, and I believe my technical abilities as an underwater photographer have improved in a way I would never have thought possible. I cannot wait to use my new-found skills to better share my future adventures around the world! ■

*Danny Copeland*

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# WINING & DIVING Italy

NICK AND CAROLINE ROBERTSON-BROWN continue their Wining & Diving tour, this time hitting the shores of Italy

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Scenic views topside

Barrels of wine

Nick checks out some new transport

Italy is a sumptuous country well known for its great food, wonderful countryside and stunningly good wines, but what about the diving? Well, we can tell you that combining all these wonderful attributes with diving the marine reserves around Portofino makes for a great trip. Great news, on top of this, is that there are a host of cheap flights to Pisa and Genoa, the latter being the closest. There is also the realistic possibility of making this a road trip and driving there, with several other diving possibilities along the way. This option could make this trip particularly worthwhile, especially if you want to make a few leisurely stops along the way across France, picking up wine and diving Etang de Tau and the Cote d'Azure. For this trip, we flew with Ryanair from Liverpool to Pisa and picked up a hire car (using the helpful services of Rhino Car Hire) at the airport. We arrived at our hotel well after the sun had gone down and so would have to wait until morning to get a real feel for our home for the next few days.

The first leg of this trip was to be based in Rapallo, situated on Italy's Ligurian coast, very close to the Portofino Natural Marine Reserve, which has been in existence since 1999. The whole area features a coastline that sees dramatic cliffs descending into steep walls underneath the (usually) clear water. As a result of this protection against harmful fishing practices for more than 15 years, these walls are now covered in life. As you descend along the sloping walls, the boulders and rock formations are covered in sea-grass and algae, with small fish chasing each other around the nooks and crannies. As you start to go deeper, the green gives way to a riot of colour: red, orange and yellow gorgionians cover every available vertical space. Nudibranchs of all shapes and sizes can be found here, along with huge grouper, morays tucked away while being cleaned by striped shrimp, and schools of fish that soar from depth up towards the shallows. As part of the marine reserve, each dive site has its own mooring buoy and so anchor damage is prevented too. The dive sites we visited were all tucked into small bays within a scenic, 15-20 minute boat ride from Rapallo Harbour. For those that want to go deeper, there is plenty of opportunity on the walls as well, as there are more than ten wrecks that lie in the 40-100m range. We stayed shallower than that, but still also got a great wreck dive on the Mohawk Deer, a Canadian cargo ship, which lies in 18-40m. It sank while being towed to be scrapped. A storm picked up in ferocity and she broke her tow line, hit rocks and broke into two pieces before sinking, conveniently for the diving fraternity, close to the cliffs. The bow lies nearest to the shore and in the shallowest water. While she did break in two back in 1967, she is still relatively intact and makes a great dive. Another rather unusual dive site, which we were keen to visit, is Christ of the Abyss - a statue of Christ that was erected underneath the water in the 1950s to protect all seagoing folk. It stands, arms outstretched towards the surface, much like the iconic statue that dominated the World Cup final, with a lightly encrusted layer of marine life, and the occasional fish grazing on the growth and cleaning it up. We got up early to ensure that we were the only two divers on the site, which can get a little busy with divers, snorkellers and boat traffic. Our dive centre was very helpful and asked staff to come in early to run a boat just for us to do this site before the rest of the divers arrived for the day. We were pleasantly surprised with our five dives over three days in the area and would happily go back!

***"Our tour had us walking around the cool ancient cellars, where the wine is aged before being bottled, visiting the private collection of wines dating back to before the war, and then the best bit: tasting some of the wines"***

We dived with Abyss Divers in Rapallo, who run an excellent set-up for both recreational and technical divers. Several of their staff have been involved in world record freediving attempts as support divers waiting and watching at serious depths, in case of incident. Everything is run at really civilised times, with no early starts, and the boat coming back into port for the surface interval and to allow time to grab a spot of lunch at one of the seafront restaurants. The centre offers plenty of space to gear-up, lockers to keep your essentials safe while you are out diving, very good rental gear as well as showers and an outside drying area. Heavy gear is taken down to the harbour using a scooter pick-up, with divers following on foot for the easy five-minute walk to the boat. In the evening, after your diving day is finished there are amazing bars, restaurants and enotecas (a sort of wine bar where you can also taste delicacies with your

*"For those that want to go deeper, there is plenty of opportunity on the walls as well, as there are more than ten wrecks that lie in the 40-100m range"*

Coral-encrusted wall

Remnants of a shipwreck

Christ of the Abyss

refreshments). It is a lovely town to grab a cold beer after a dive or two, or try a glass of local wine, that is always served with complimentary local meats, cheeses and other nibbles to keep you satisfied.

As we surfaced from our Christ of the Abyss dive, in glorious sunshine, we knew that our diving was over for this trip and that we needed to load up our gear into our hire car and set off to our next destination. As this was a Wining & Diving tour, we had to drag ourselves away from the diving and head just a couple of hours north to one of the most-famous wine regions in Italy - Barolo. The countryside is spectacular, with amazing views as you drive between the tunnels cut out of marble, and wind up quieter roads towards the mountains. Barolo is a small village with narrow roads, ancient stone buildings and terracotta roofs intermingled with newer homes built in a similar style. After our sat nav managed to get us wedged in a tiny road from where our hosts had to guide us out, we stayed in a wonderful B&B in the heart of the village (La Giolitta) where we could abandon the car and walk to the local vineyards and restaurants. It was an opportunity to take time out to relax a bit after a busy few diving days, and so we walked around the village in the sunshine and visited just one vineyard on our first day, the oldest of the Barolo vineyards, Marchesi de Barolo. Our tour had us walking around the cool ancient cellars, where the wine is aged before being bottled, visiting the private collection of wines dating back to before the war, and then the best bit: tasting some of the wines, along with some great cheese. We also got a surprise visit from one of the owners, who is herself a diver! We had three vineyards on our 'to do' list, ranging from the very traditional to the more-modern approach. All three gave us a sample of the wonderful wines that this region produces. The most famous of the local wines is Barolo, and this really is a special wine in the hands of the right people. The best ones are quite expensive, but the Nebbiolo and Barbera from the top producers are stunning and affordable. The Barolo wine takes the name of the village, with several other variations of the Nebbiolo grape available, such as the two just mentioned. The growers are passionate about their wines and so visits and tastings are well worth it. Eating in Italy is always a joy too, especially so in a beautiful setting renowned for its food and drink - this is a perfect place to relax away from all things diving. ■

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LYNX

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# SCUBALAB WHAT'S NEW

## SUB GEAR KID'S LINE | £14-£269 (€20.11-€386.49)

Life is all about family. For scuba divers, there are few things more enjoyable than watching the blush of discovery light up the face of a son or daughter upon seeing their first sea lion, moray eel or starfish in their natural habitat. But in order for kids to be able to fully enjoy these life-altering ocean experiences, they must be properly outfitted with safe and dependable dive and snorkel gear. This doesn't mean simply strapping them into an extra-small adult BCD, or padding the foot pocket of a full-sized fin to accommodate their tiny feet. On the contrary, to be completely comfortable, safe and happy in the water, kids need gear that's been built specifically for them, gear they can truly call their own.

Sub Gear has expanded the kids range. With a new design in bright apple green and more products to choose from than ever before, there's now an even wider range of snorkelling and diving gear for children:

### SG10 REGULATOR (SRP: £169)

This compact downstream piston first stage and a lightweight, pre-set downstream valve second stage delivers reliable performance and value. It comes with a shorter LP hose and a kid-sized mouthpiece.

### REBEL BCD (SRP: £269)

Constructed of 420D nylon for lightweight durability, this full-featured wrap-around BCD grows with the child by means of specially designed adjustments. It includes a shorter inflator hose and large cargo pockets for collecting treasures. Weight integration is optional.

### REBEL 6MM STEAMER (SRP: £120)

Traditional steamer offers thicker X-Foam neoprene for warmth. Extra-long wrist and ankle zippers make it easier to get in and out of the suit.

### REBEL 3MM STEAMER (SRP: £80)

Offering a stylish design and kid-friendly cut. Made from ultra-soft neoprene for all-day comfort.

### REBEL 5MM VEST (SRP: £80)

It can be combined with Rebel steamers - ideal for colder temperatures.

### REBEL 2.5MM SHORTY (SRP: £39)

Featuring a cool modern design, it offers excellent flexibility due to side stretch panels. A very comfortable shorty.

### REBEL 3MM GLOVES (SRP: £26)

In super-stretch plush neoprene for protection, comfort and warmth. The gusseted Velcro flap is easy for kids to open and close and helps the gloves stay in place while keeping water out.

### REBEL 5MM HOOD (SRP: £29)

Bibbed design protects the head and neck from cold water. Bib tucks nicely inside the wetsuit neckline. Made from super-stretchy neoprene for comfort and fit with multiple Velcro closure points.

### SUPER SOXX BOOT (SRP: £14)

The kids bootie in 3mm neoprene has a sturdy sole and is easily adjustable with the Velcro fastener.

**www.subgear.com**

## OCEANIC HERA | £419 (€602.27)

The newly re-styled Oceanic Hera BCD is built from the ground up for the ladies and comes standard with all the features and durability required of a high-end BCD. The design also incorporates Oceanic's Patented Adjustable Positioning System, rugged yet lightweight materials, plenty of storage and capacity for 14kg of integrated weights into what the company consider may be the most-comfortable, best-fitting BCD you'll ever wear.
**www.oceanic.com**

## FOURTH ELEMENT DRY-SAC
## £9.95-£19.95 (€14.30-€28.68)

Super-lightweight dry-sac with roll-top closure, ideal for keeping equipment dry thanks to waterproof, taped seams. Helps to compartmentalise and organise gear within larger bags and luggage systems, or just handy for tucking things away that you don't want to get wet when you are out on the RIB or a dayboat.
Available in four useful sizes - five litres (£9.95), 15 litres (£14.95), 20 litres (£17.50) and 30 litres (£19.95).
**www.fourthelement.com**

## FINN SUB FLY SIDE | £549 (€789.13)

The Fly Side sidemount systems have been developed together with those diving in open water, complicated cave systems, wrecks and inland dive sites, which means it works perfectly for all types of diving. Finn Sub wanted a system which would let the user arrange enough weight to submerge and dive comfortably from start to finish, and their solution was simple - a backplate for perfect distribution of weight along the diver's back. A unique combination of big lift, robust construction and streamlined profile allows the user to dive in any situation from open water to overhead environment, while the double-shell structure of the wing provides a flat shape even if it's fully inflated. The wing has three holes, each of which can be used for the inflator, dump valve or blank plug, while the harness is fully customisable, with a choice of backplates, aluminium for travelling or stainless steel for local dives.
**www.finnsub.com**

## HOLLIS CONVERTIBLE SPOOL | £110 (€158.11)

The Hollis Convertible Spool is an innovative guideline device that has been machined from solid Delrin to achieve precise tolerances and assembled using braided Dupont Dacron Hi-Viz line. The convertible spool can easily be switched from a reel configuration to a finger spool in minutes. The unique design is perfect as a safety, gap or jump reel. Or combine this spool with an SMB for deco stops.
**www.hollis.com**

# SCUBALAB GEAR GUIDE

Each month the Sport Diver test team assembles to rate and review a selection of diving equipment from a range of manufacturers. This issue:
**BCDs priced £250-£400**

**BCDS.** BCDs are one of the core essentials of your dive kit - after all, without it, you aren't going to have anything to hold your tank (as well as your regulators) on your back, and you will have no means of buoyancy control (unless you are in a drysuit, but let's not get into that debate!).
We split the BCDs into three price brackets - under £250, £250-£400, and over £400 - and then assembled the Test Team to venture into the chilly waters of Vivian Quarry in the heart of Snowdonia in North Wales in June for the annual review.
This issue we are focusing on the mid-price range to see what is available in today's marketplace. As well as giving our opinion on the looks of the jackets - after all, aesthetics are becoming increasingly important in diving - we also comment on the comfort of the BCDs, and the ease of use and performance of power inflators, pull dumps, pockets, integrated weights, etc.

## THE TEST TEAM

**MARK EVANS**
- Sport Diver editor
- PADI Divemaster
- 30 years of diving experience

**MATT MARTIN**
- Dive officer, Blue Planet Aquarium
- PADI OWSI
- 10 years of diving experience

**WILL HARRISON**
- Sport Diver deputy editor
- PADI TEC 50
- 6 years of diving experience

**BARRY HENDERSON**
- Rope access specialist
- NAUI OW Diver
- 5 years of diving experience

## BCDS ON TEST

**MODELS**
- Aqualung Axiom
- Beaver Tornado
- Mares Prestige MRS+
- Oceanic Atmos
- Scubapro Equator
- Seac Sub Sherpa
- Sherwood Avid III
- Sopras Sub Speleo 1500
- SubGear Black Jac
- Zeagle Stiletto

**DATE TESTED** 15/6/15

**WATER TEMPERATURE**
8-9 degrees C

Test dives conducted at Vivian Diving Centre in Llanberis, North Wales

## AQUALUNG AXIOM | £399 (€572)

**MARK:** Very comfortable jacket, both on the surface and in the water. It has the tried-and-tested SureLock II integrated weight system, and is equipped with a rapid power inflator and efficient pull dumps. Supportive in the water, with little tank movement. Reasonable pockets which are easily accessible. Subtle looks. Good all-round jacket.

**WILL:** Nice jacket. Snug fit keeps everything where it should be, and I particularly like the swivelling shoulder clips. Plenty of D-rings, easy-to-access pockets and powerful inflator teamed up with rapid pull dumps.

**MATT:** Good-looking BCD, not too flash but it will stand the test of time and not date too quickly. Great in the water, with plenty of support, and the power inflator and the dump valves work exceptionally well. Not a fan of the pinch-clip strap that goes around the neck of the cylinder - this is a weak point that lets an otherwise great BCD down.

**BARRY:** Brilliant jacket. Holds you well on the surface and underwater, with minimal tank roll. Pockets are a good size and easy to get to, the integrated weight system is one of the best here, and the power inflator and the pull dumps work well. Nice piece of kit all-round.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★★ |
| LOOKS | ★★★★☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★☆ |

**WE LIKE**
Performance, comfort, build quality, looks

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Nothing worth mentioning

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**BEFORE YOU HIT THE WATER:** Get comfortable - adjust the internal ends of the cummerbund so the outer ends overlap between three to six inches when secured over your stomach. Prep for tank - thread tank strap(s) through their buckles, and then slip on to your tank, making such buckles are centred and Velcro patches are postioned where they can be utilised.

## BEAVER TORNADO | £312 (€448)

**MARK:** Like its cheaper sibling, the Lightning, the Tornado's design is a little bland compared with most of its rivals in this price sector, however, the BCD is robustly constructed and has the best pockets of any jacket here by a country mile. They are massive, and easy to get into. The integrated weight system works well, and the power inflator and pull dumps do their job.

**WILL:** Simple looks, but built to last and it performs well in the water. It provides a good fit and has plenty of lift, supporting you well while diving and on the surface. The pockets are huge and easy to use.

**MATT:** The Tornado doesn't look that different to the cheaper Lightning, save for the addition of integrated weights. That said, it is certainly rugged, and has a robust build quality that would see it put up with years of British diver abuse. Comfortable enough, with efficient pull dumps and power inflator.

**BARRY:** Compared with other jackets here, this does look a bit dated, but like its cheaper cousin, I am not offended by the styling. In the water, it works well, is comfortable, and has monster pockets that are a joy to use. Decent integrated weight system.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★☆ |
| LOOKS | ★★★☆☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★☆ |

**WE LIKE**
Price, build quality, comfort

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Looks a bit bland compared to others on test

## MARES PRESTIGE MRS+ | £283 (€406)

**MARK:** Good-looking jacket with typical Mares styling points. Comfortable fit, excellent integrated weight system, ergonomic power inflator and efficient pull dumps. The pockets are easy to access. All-round great BCD, made all the better by the bargain-basement price.

**WILL:** Nice-looking BCD with the usual Italian flair. The integrated weight system is great, and it has good-sized pockets that you can access with little difficulty. The power inflator sits nicely in your hand and works well. The toggles on the pull dumps are chunky and easy to locate.

**MATT:** Very comfortable jacket, which holds you nice and tight - no tank roll in the water, and plenty of support on the surface. The pockets are accessible, and the integrated weight system is a tried-and-tested mechanism. The power inflator and pull dumps work well.

**BARRY:** Big fan of this jacket. It is comfortable and supportive, and provides plenty of lift on the surface, while holding you in a good trim position underwater. Excellent power inflator and pull dumps, large pockets, and good integrated weights, and all at a very good price.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★☆ |
| LOOKS | ★★★★★ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★★ |

**WE LIKE**
Price, build quality, integrated weights, looks

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Nothing worth mentioning

**BEFORE YOU HIT THE WATER:** Give it a thorough check-over - turn on the air in your cylinder and inflate the BCD to test for leaks and proper power-inflator function. Pull all of the dump valve cords to make sure the exhausts are working correctly and that there is no wear and tear to the string. If fitted, ensure integrated weights are securely in place.

## OCEANIC ATMOS | £299 (€429)

**MARK:** Exceptionally comfortable jacket, and very stable underwater thanks to the design of the bladder. Plenty of lift on the surface as well. Easily accessible pockets, though slightly restricted when the weight pockets are full. Integrated weights work well, and the power inflator and pull dumps are good too. Bargain price for a great little jacket.

**WILL:** Nice jacket. Subtle good looks, and a performance to match it - supportive on the surface and underwater, with little tank movement. Decent pockets, and good power inflator and pull dumps. Impressive all-round BCD at a great price.

**MATT:** Looks far more expensive than it actually is, thanks to its subtle good looks and robust build quality. Good performance on land and in the water - decent pockets, excellent power inflator and pull dumps, and solid integrated weight system. Well-made bit of kit - I like it.

**BARRY:** Very impressed by this BCD. It looks the part, with understated looks that won't date too quickly, and is built to last. In the water it was very comfortable and held me in a good position. I like the integrated weight system and the pull dumps and power inflator are efficient. I'd buy one now.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★★ |
| LOOKS | ★★★★☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★★ |

**WE LIKE**
Build quality, comfort, looks, performance, price

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Nothing worth mentioning

## SCUBAPRO EQUATOR | £329 (€472)

**MARK:** I was a big fan of the original Equator BCD, and I was pleased to see that the vibrant red colour scheme has been retained on this new version. I like the inclusion of the smooth material on the pockets and shoulder straps, but think the wording about integrated weights near the pinch clips looks a bit naff. Performance-wise, the Equator is just as good as it always was - rapid power inflator, swift pull dumps, comfortable fit, plenty of lift and support on the surface and underwater - and all for a great price.

**WILL:** The Equator is a comfortable jacket, with all the Scubapro trimmings. The pull dumps are extremely fast, with big, chunky toggles that are easy to find. Personally not a fan of the desgin of the power inflator, but it does work well. Plenty of lift, and very comfortable in use.

**MATT:** Not too keen on the looks, but hard to fault in the water - zero tank movement, plenty of support, rapid power inflator and pull dumps, and very comfy. Good value for money.

**BARRY:** I like the looks and feel of this jacket - it stands out from the crowd, and feels made to last. Very comfortable, and great power inflator and pull dumps. Integrated weight system is compact and works well.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★★ |
| LOOKS | ★★★★☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★★ |

**WE LIKE**
Price, build quality, looks, performance

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Looks split opinion

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**RETURNING HOME AFTER A DAY'S DIVING:** Hose it - start the cleaning process with a hearty wash using a freshwater hose. This will knock off any big chunks of sand and dirt, as well as residual salt. Soak it - Fill a tub with fresh water, dunk the BCD repeatedly, then leave it to soak for about five minutes. Afterwards. give it another slosh with the fresh water hose.

## SEAC SUB SHERPA | £379 (€544)

**MARK:** Overall a reasonable jacket, which is comfortable enough, looks the part, and is well built. Unfortunately, it is let down by small pockets that are awkward to access, and a ridiculously long cord on the shoulder pull dump - it easily got lost when you trying to locate it.

**WILL:** Good, solid BCD, which performs well in the water and offers plenty of support and lift, but it is hampered by that silly long cord on the shoulder dump - you could easily cut six to eight inches off it. And the integrated weights do impact on the amount of space in the pockets.

**MATT:** Nice-looking jacket, with an attractive design. The pockets are quite small, but reasonably easy to access, but I am astounded by that long cord on the pull dump. Why, is all I can ask? If you buy one, first thing you want to do is cut off about six inches and then it will hang in about the right place.

**BARRY:** Good-looking BCD with a subtle design. Well made, and extremely comfortable, both on the surface and underwater. The long cord on the shoulder dump made the toggle very hard to find, as it can end up getting lost behind the shoulder strap and the chest strap.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★☆☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★☆ |
| LOOKS | ★★★★☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★☆☆ |

**WE LIKE**
Build quality, comfort, looks

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Long cord on shoulder strap

## SHERWOOD AVID III | £399 (€572)

**MARK:** The Sherwood Avid II performed well in previous group tests, and put up a good showing in a six-month Long Term Test. The Avid III continues this tradition, proving to be comfortable, giving plenty of in-water support, and looking pretty slick too. Not convinced by the pinch clips (male and female) on the jacket, though - too limiting, normal D-rings are far more use.

**WILL:** Comfortable, with a well-padded backpad. Holds you well in the water, and provides a snug fit. The dumps work well, and the power inflator is efficient. Big pockets, integrated weights and decent looks - overall, a nice jacket.

**MATT:** I liked this jacket. The looks are a bit retro, but it works, and in use it performed very well - comfortable, good fit with little tank movement, decent pull dumps and power inflator. Spot on bit of kit.

**BARRY:** Nice jacket. I like the looks of this BCD, and it is very comfortable as well. The pockets were a bit awkward to access in the water, but the integrated weight system worked fine, and the power inflator and pull dumps did the job.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★☆ |
| LOOKS | ★★★☆☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★☆ |

**WE LIKE**
Price, build quality, looks

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Nothing worth mentioning

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**RETURNING HOME AFTER A DAY'S DIVING:** Final okay - make sure everything is in working order by reinserting the - empty - integrated weight pockets and locking them in place, fully inflating the bladder and checking for leaks, and then pulling the corrugated hose dump and pull dump cords. Partially inflate the bladder and hang-dry the BCD out of direct sunlight.

## SOPRAS SUB SPELEO 1500 | £275 (€395)

**MARK:** The Sopras Sub School was a very basic jacket, but it did its job well and was robustly built. The Speleo 1500 boasts a similar build quality, but is somewhat lacking in other areas. In the water it performs well, offering decent support underwater and on the surface, and the power inflator works fine, but the cords on the pull dumps are far too long, making the toggles awkward to find. And the pockets are badly positioned to access underwater.

**WILL:** I found the cheaper Sopras Sub more comfortable than this one, to be honest. This feels a bit ungainly in the water, but there is no doubting the durable build quality, or the budget price.

**MATT:** I didn't like the feel of this jacket in the water either. It just doesn't seem to sit right. The power inflator works absolutely fine, but the pull dumps are quite slow, and the long cords make locating the toggles a royal pain.

**BARRY:** Not a fan of this BCD. It is reasonably comfortable topside, but in the water it doesn't feel that supportive. The power inflator is more than adequate, but the pull dump cords just made venting the air a chore instead of a breeze.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★☆☆☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★☆☆ |
| LOOKS | ★★★☆☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★☆☆ |

**WE LIKE**
Price, build quality

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Long pull dump cords, pocket design

## SUBGEAR BLACK JAC | £369 (€530)

**MARK:** The Pure Black impressed in last month's test, and the Black Jac continues this trend. It looks good in a subtle way, which will not date over time, and it is well made to boot. It is comfortable, the pull dumps work well and are easy to find, thanks to the chunky toggles, and the integrated weight system is simple and efficient. Nice big pockets which have a dual zipper so you can choose which way they open up. Cracking BCD.

**WILL:** Comfy jacket, which feels very well made and durable. Good-sized pockets with chunky zippers, excellent integrated weight system and decent power inflator and pull dumps. All round, a strong performer.

**MATT:** I like the looks of the Black Jac. It is fairly understated, but in a good way. Comfortable on the surface and in the water, with minimal tank roll, and it holds you in a nice trim position while diving. The pull dumps have great big toggles - easy to find with neoprene gloves on.

**BARRY:** Lookswise, this is fairly straightforward, but it is well made and is none the worse for it. Comfy, with a good integrated weight system, and more-than-adequate power inflator and pull dumps.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★☆ |
| LOOKS | ★★★★☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★★☆ |

**WE LIKE**
Build quality, comfort, looks, performance

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Nothing worth mentioning

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**RETURNING HOME AFTER A DAY'S DIVING:** Final okay - make sure everything is in working order by reinserting the - empty - integrated weight pockets and locking them in place, fully inflating the bladder and checking for leaks, and then pulling the corrugated hose dump and pull dump cords. Partially inflate the bladder and hang-dry the BCD out of direct sunlight.

## ZEAGLE STILETTO | £398 (€571)

**MARK:** Zeagles are solidly built BCDs, and the Stiletto feels typically robust. It offers a comfortable fit, and the wing-like bladder provides plenty of lift in the water and keeps you stable. The power inflator works well, but I wish they'd put one of the rear kidney dumps on the right shoulder. As we've said before, in an emergency, the Ripcord release system is excellent - a one-handed pull drops all your weights - but if you are diving out of a RIB, you have to unzip the pockets and hand up the weights, which is a bit of a faff. The optional weight pockets, which sit inside the jacket pockets, are worth investing in.

**WILL:** The Zeagle is comfortable and holds you well in the water in a solid trim position. The rear kidney dumps work well, but I missed the right shoulder pull dump found on most other jackets. The power inflator is decent, and the pockets are accessible, if quite small.

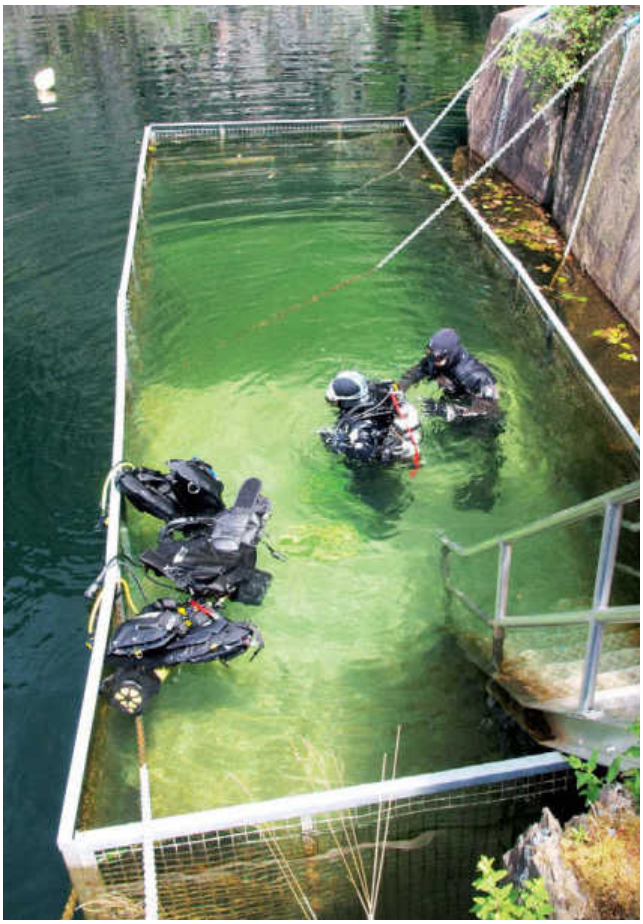
**MATT:** The pockets are extremely small, and I am not a fan of the weight system. Comfortable enough, though, and plenty of lift and support in the water.

**BARRY:** Good fit and comfortable in the water, but I didn't like the lack of a shoulder dump. Well-made jacket.

| SPORT DIVER VERDICT | |
|---|---|
| PERFORMANCE | ★★★★☆ |
| COMFORT | ★★★★☆ |
| LOOKS | ★★★☆☆ |
| VALUE FOR MONEY | ★★★☆☆ |

**WE LIKE**
Build quality, comfort

**WE DON'T LIKE**
Lack of shoulder dump



**CONCLUSION.** Like the budget BCDs, the standard of the mid-range jackets just gets better and better, and again there are a few here that wouldn't look out of place in the next price bracket. They all performed okay, with some excelling in certain areas, which is great news for divers wanting a middle-of-the-road BCD in the near future.

For the Best Value award, it was a battle between the Oceanic Atmos and the Mares Prestige MRS+. There were various BCDs in the lower end of the price scale, but these two stood out as the leaders in terms of looks, comfort, performance and features, Both are well-featured jackets for the money, and either represent a fine choice for under £300, but in the end the Oceanic just scraped ahead of the Mares to take the title.

For the Choice award, it was a battle between the Scubapro Equator, the SubGear Black Jac and the Aqualung Axiom. The Scubapro performed well and has a great price, but the new looks let it down somewhat. The Black Jac is a fine BCD, with plenty going for it, but the Aqualung just nudged ahead to be crowned winner of the Choice award.

| | VEO 1 - £135 | VEO 2 - £169 | VEO 3 - £214 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nitrox | Up to 50% | Up to 50% | Up to 100% |
| Gas Switching | No | No | 2 Gases |
| Alarms | Audible, On Screen | Audible, On screen, LED | Audible, On screen, LED |
| Backlight | No | OceanGlo | OceanGlo |
| PC/Mac Interface | No | Optional | Optional |
| Buttons | 1 | 2 | 3 |

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# SCUBALAB LONG TERM

## AQUALUNG PRO

The Aqualung Pro is an entry-level, non-weight-integrated jacket-style BCD. It has large zippered pockets, a gauge holder and an adjustable cummerbund. There is an integrated carry handle, and scooped pockets for your octopus. There are three D-rings - two plastic and one stainless steel - for attaching accessories, and a pull dump on the right shoulder. The air cell is made from fade-resistant, abrasion-resistant ResisteK fabric, and the non-air cell fabric is fade-resistant Armor X and 1050 Ballistic.

It is available in a wide range of sizes, from XS to XL. It is designed to appeal to the leisure diver, and offers plenty of features for the money.

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | JULY 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £245 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 0 |
| TIME IN WATER | 0 HRS 0 MINS |

**Mark Evans**
**www.aqualung.com**

## APEKS LIFELINE 30-METRE SPOOL

The Apeks Lifeline spool accompanied me to Egypt, and thanks to its reasonably compact size, it effortlessly fitted into my tech thigh pocket along with a small DSMB - perfect for firing up to the surface from 5m when doing a safety stop. The spool is a joy to use, feeling very solid in your hand, and the line is very bright and vivid in sunlight.

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | MAY 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £60 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 26 |
| TIME IN WATER | 25 HRS 35 MINS |

**Mark Evans**
**www.apeks.co.uk**

## KUBI DRY GLOVE SYSTEM

The KUBI dry gloves have been out and about again, after their week up north in Scapa Flow, and were keeping my hands nice and warm at the annual TEKCamp event at Vobster Quay. This time I was teaming up the Fourth Element Xerotherm wrist warmers with the Polartac glove liners from KUBI and in my opinion this has been the warmest combo yet. The Polartec gloves are slightly thicker than the top-of-the-range Merino wool gloves, and 'fill out' the fingers of the KUBIs better, so you don't get lots of slack at the ends of your fingertips - not useful when you are trying to operate a camera housing.

KUBI must be doing something right - it was interesting to see just how many attendees were sporting KUBIs on their drysuits.

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | FEBRUARY 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £156 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 38 |
| TIME IN WATER | 36 HRS 55 MINS |

**Mark Evans**
**www.KUBIstore.com**

## SCUBAPRO MANTIS M1

Well, we've got a few more dives under our belt now on the Mantis and I am starting to get used to the screen display. The liquid crystal digits are very clean and distinct, and despite not being the largest are still easy to make out, even in lousy British diving conditions. Navigation-wise, again it becomes easier the more you do it, but the addition of the engraving on the surround to tell you what each button does is a major help!

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | MAY 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £369 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 14 |
| TIME IN WATER | 13 HRS 30 MINS |

**Mark Evans**
**www.scubapro.co.uk**

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## HOLLIS EXPLORER eSCR

After its challenging week of diving in the cold water of Scapa Flow, I packed up the Explorer and hauled it off to Egypt with me for a spot of warm-water diving. And I have to say, it excelled in these conditions, which are a far more 'natural' environment for the unit. Diving the Explorer in just a wetsuit was a joy, and being able to get up close and personal with the marine life was great, especially when taking photographs.

**Mark Evans**
**www.hollis.com**

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | MARCH 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £4,199 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 39 |
| TIME IN WATER | 38 HRS 50 MINS |

## FINN SUB 3000 SHORT

The Finn Sub 3000 Short did a sterling job up in Scapa, and it accompanied me on a few test dives in Vivian Quarry and down to TEKCamp. However, on the last couple of dives, we've encountered a bit of an issue - the torch is fully charged, but for some reason, after about five to ten minutes, it just goes off. I am doing a few scientific tests - i.e. putting it in a bucket of water and timing it to see when it goes off to check if it is the same all the time - and then we might be able to get to the bottom of it, but it is certainly frustrating. And the Finn Sub team were none the wiser, as they have never encountered this problem before. Watch this space for more information.

**Mark Evans**
**www.finnsub.com**

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | APRIL 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £549 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 23 |
| TIME IN WATER | 21 HRS 35 MINS |

## URSUIT HEAVY LIGHT KEVLAR BDS

The Ursuit Heavy Light is designed with a three-layer breathable fabric reinforced with Kevlar - the BDS part of its name stands for Breathable Diving Suit. Designed for professional divers, rescue personnel and tech divers, the BDS aims to provide the diver with the two most critical things one looks for in a drysuit: comfort and durability. The BDS system, along with the telescopic torso, crotch strap and integrated suspenders ensure the suit is as comfortable as a drysuit can be - there's a lot to be said for light material and a perfect fit. The Kevlar exterior protects against tears and punctures, with the main contact points reinforced.

**Will Harrison**
**www.liquidsports.co.uk**

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | MARCH 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £1,600 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 13 |
| TIME IN WATER | 12 HRS 35 MINS |

## SCUBAPRO X-BLACK

END OF TERM

That's it, the end of the six-month trial with the Scubapro X-Black, and I think it is safe to say we will all be sad to see it go. The X-Black has proved itself to be comfortable, great in the water, and it looks ultra-cool as well, thanks to its slick black with a dash of red colour scheme. Even Will Harrison, who is not a fan of power inflators that have the inflate and deflate buttons on the same orientation, was forced to admit that he really liked the X-Black, though to be honest he rarely got his hands on it as it became like a comfort coat to me, and it was a delight just to throw on and go diving. Yes, it isn't a cheap BCD, but it works very well and it looks the business, so what's not to like?

**Mark Evans**
**www.scubapro.co.uk**

| INFORMATION | |
|---|---|
| DATE ACQUIRED | FEBRUARY 2015 |
| SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE | £549 |
| NUMBER OF DIVES | 22 |
| TIME IN WATER | 21 HRS 25 MINS |

# EXERCISES IN UNDERWATER SELFISHNESS

**JEREMY CUFF** explores the idea of taking the selfie craze below the waterline

Photographs by **JEREMY CUFF/WWW.JA-UNIVERSE.COM**

The phenomenon of the 'selfie' has been sweeping the digital landscape over recent years, with certain high-profile selfies even making global news (for whatever reason they do). For underwater photographers, they can provide an interesting niche to explore… Though self portraits or 'selfies' are nothing new in photography, they have burgeoned with the advent of digital technology and social media, as people upload huge amounts of images and content detailing their daily lives, experiences and travels. Regardless of what we may individually think about the merits of all this fuss that seems to surround them these days, they do give underwater photographers something different to try. As an underwater photographer, it's easy to get stuck in ruts of taking the same kinds of images each time you go diving.

Taking selfies is a diversion that can take you on some interesting little tangents. Over recent years while on dive trips around the world (with a certain amount of obliviousness of the selfie phenomenon going on in the wider world) and armed with my lenses of choice (a 10.5mm fish-eye or 10-17mm zoom), I've sometimes spent odd bits of time taking underwater self portraits.

I've taken them in swimming pools, in the shallows, on safety stops and have even included wildlife as part of the idea. To get started, you'll ideally need a wide-angle or fish-eye lens such as those mentioned above (or an equivalent if not using a digital SLR). Initially, it's probably best trying some selfies in easy conditions - perhaps in a swimming pool or off a beach where it's easy to review the results quickly and figure out the kind of things that work best.

In order to get them right, there are several things to consider, such as strobe positioning and settings, eye contact, the pose of the your own body within the image, background light levels and composition. For the strobe, it's primarily a case of getting the lighting and positioning correct for your face (if indeed you're using one, as they aren't essential in all circumstances). Ideally, you want to light your eyes and face correctly, so it's worth experimenting with this in order to understand the optimum settings for your particular brand of strobe. Fisheye lenses will distort arms and legs, so it's worth spending time getting the best pose for your body.

Basically, it's a case of trying a few things such as outstretching your arms, lifting your chin, pairing up your legs and so on to see which works best and is most pleasing on the eye. Of course, it isn't just the foreground that matters - the background must also be correctly exposed (and composed, if you're planning to include any scenery, object or moving subject), so care must be taken to get this right. Care must also be taken to avoid getting the sun into the image and getting a whiteout, so a constant awareness of the background and the whereabouts of the sun is essential. Sometimes, the sun can be hidden behind you, or a background object such as a boat silhouette that you're wanting to include. I've produced some interesting results by just playing around in swimming pools or the shallows armed with just a mask.

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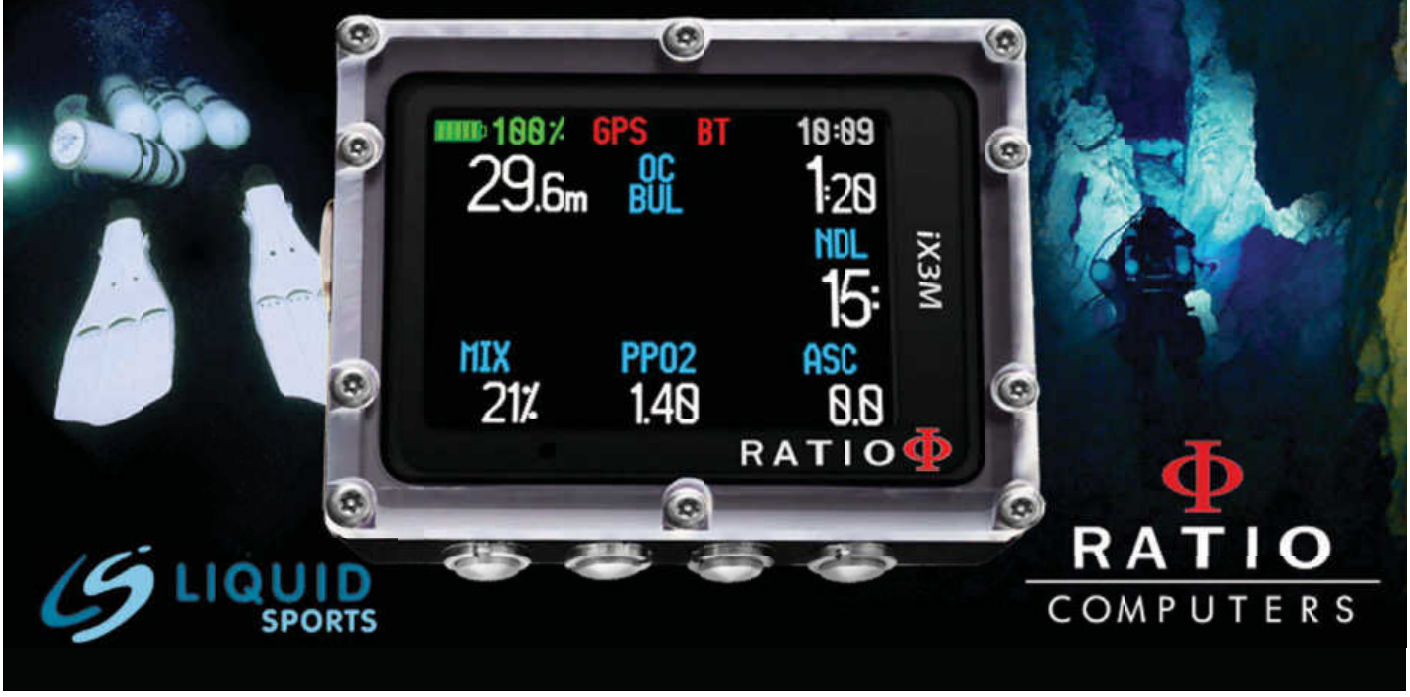


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*"The best of the bunch was a split level selfie taken underneath the jetty with one of the dive centre staff looking down to see what I was doing - it worked quite well"*

You can employ all manner of effects

Jetty selfie

During a trip to the Cayman Islands, I tried some images with slow shutter speeds in low light (at dusk) using the rear curtain sync flash settings which creates a unique impression of movement.

Other pool or shallow water shots that are worth pursuing are where there are interesting backdrops such as overhanging trees, fountains, colourful sunshades, tall buildings or other structures that can be included in the image. For example, at the Maldivian resort of Bandos, I spent a good couple of hours one afternoon wandering around the island, paddling into the shallows to try out ideas in what I considered the most-interesting spots. Some worked and some didn't. Moving forward to actual dives, the easiest selfies to take are those with static backgrounds such as a nice surface texture, a boat silhouette, or the underside of a jetty to make it a bit more interesting and give context. Recently in Egypt, at a dive site just south of El Quseir, I decided to try a few images of myself pretending to grab fire coral for the amusement of our son Zac. Going back a few years, while in the Socorro Islands on Mexico's Pacific side, I was able to get an image of divers approaching the RIB above me. To make this image work, I outstretched my arms and hid the midday sun behind my head. On a difficult dive trip to Loloata Island in Papua New Guinea several years back, where I was stricken with a horrendous sinus infection and unable to dive, I was still able to get some images by pottering around the surface waters by the jetty trying a few things. The best of the bunch was a split-level selfie taken underneath the structure with one of the dive centre staff looking down to see what I was doing - it worked quite well. The most difficult selfies to get right are those that include wildlife. As a photographer, you've got to decide what kind of images matter to you most, so unless you've got a lot of time in one place or a very cooperative subject, you may have to make a choice as to what you want to achieve (i.e. between a conventional wildlife shot or a selfie that attempts to include the animal). While diving in Borneo, at the idyllic Lankayan Island,

***"One of the photographs was quite amusing, with the cuttlefish positioned in front of my face, with its tentacles looking like I'd grown some kind of mutant beard!"***

Snell's Window

Jeremy positions the sun behind his body

Pirates of the Caribbean, anyone?

we were treated to some very reliable cuttlefish that could always be found close to or underneath the jetty. Over a number of diving days, I was able to spend quite a lot of time photographing these fascinating molluscs, which included a bit of time on selfies - one of which was quite amusing, with the animal positioned in front of my face, with its tentacles looking like I'd grown some kind of mutant beard!

Perhaps the most-tricky selfie to capture is when you want to include something unpredictable, fast-moving and skittish, like a manta ray. In the big pelagic action Mecca of the Socorro Islands I'd been fortunate in I'd already bagged a decent set of images to illustrate some trip features that I was planning to publish, so on the very last dive of the trip, at the renowned Boiler site at San Benedicto Island, it seemed like the time to try something different. Boiler is an excellent dive site for manta ray encounters, but for whatever reason, the mantas seemed wary that day and weren't keen on granting the expectant divers with any close passes during our visit.

One specimen, however, had been circling around at the surface for some time, only moving away if any diver attempted to get close to it. This specimen presented the opportunity to capture a selfie with a manta ray. I had little to lose as it was mission impossible to get close enough for a conventional shot. As long as I didn't chase the manta, it would stick around. Capturing the image proved quite tricky, with many shots failing to get the required result. The only thing I can really say about it is that once I knew the general whereabouts of the manta, I would then turn my back to it, position my body in an aesthetically pleasing way and look for its reflection in the dome port, using the auto focus to lock on to my face. It's not an exact science but in the end I got something after quite a few attempts.

Though often unsaid in texts about how underwater images are captured, it's also very important to have good buoyancy control. For the manta image, I was in mid-water, so it was vital that I maintained consistent buoyancy at my chosen depth in order for the image to work. The resulting image was one of the last that I captured on the dive before the manta decided to move on. I was satisfied with it, but there are certainly better images that could be captured using this technique if the right opportunity presented itself. The self portraits therefore remain a work in progress.

If you want your selfies to stand out from the crowd, why not indulge yourself in shameless bouts of underwater selfishness and give them a try. They might even make the news! ■

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# ADVANCED COMPOSITION:
## THE IMPLIED HORIZON LINE

On my underwater photo workshops I frequently talk about the compositional significance and nature of the horizon line. It's a myth that a compositional horizon only matters in above-water photography. It's just as important underwater but in my experience, it's often neglected compared to a land image. Neglected may be too strong a word, so let's just say it often goes unnoticed.

In compositional terms, the general rule of the horizon line tells us that if we divide the image into three equal parts, the horizon should be close to one of the two lines which divide the shot. This rule/guideline can be used when shooting the photo in the first place, or when cropping in Lightroom or Photoshop back home. On land this rule is most often considered when shooting a landscape in so much as a photograph with the horizon line right in the middle will provoke indifference. However, putting the horizon line higher will centre attention on the land and putting the horizon line lower will give the sky more prominence.

This month's image is a good example of how to use this theory underwater. The location is the dive pier on Misool Eco Resort in Raja Ampat. My angle of view is from shallow water looking out towards the end of the pier into deep blue water. My intentions on this particular photo dive were to shoot the beautiful hard corals in the shallows with the pier as a distant backdrop. Above all else, the most-important factor in making this idea work was the time of day. It was essential that I had the angle of the sun above and just a tad behind my head. In fact I was a little late entering the water and from the shadows, you can clearly see that the sun was almost directly above.

The location of the sun in the sky is so important for natural light photography. When it's directly above or behind the photographer and shooting in shallow water, all you need is the sun to illuminate the reef. Another advantage of the sun position is when it's above or behind, it has the effect of illuminating the blue water backdrop. I'd had my eye on these particular table corals all week, just waiting for the ideal height of tide for the ideal time of day. My compositional plan was to include the

table corals in the near foreground and make them the center of interest to first anchor the eye and then lead the eye through the composition to the distant photographer shooting a small school of Jacks in the upper right side of the frame. My dilemma was the horizon line. My first attempts, cut the reef and the blue water in half, which I saw as a totally unbalanced composition. I moved back a tad, took my fins off and hung them off a plank of wood behind me. I stood my booties on white sand, composed the colourful hard corals in the foreground and then considered the horizon line between the reef and blue water. I always knew that I would crop this image down to a panoramic format with the horizon line occupying the top third of the frame and the distant reef gently descending towards the left. I took about ten frames, altering my exposure via the shutter speed, as I required the very best depth of field to get front and back in sharp focus. The four Jacks swimming left to right near top centre went unnoticed until I'd downloaded to Lightroom.

My advice is to be mindful of where the blue water meets the reef when you're shooting underwater. Treat this compositionally in the same way as you would a topside landscape and consider which needs more prominence - the reef or the water background. ■

## EQUIPMENT AND SETTINGS

Nikon D300 with a Tokina 10-17mm at the 10mm end, F11 at 250th sec, ISO 200 in natural light, flashguns detached.

## MARTIN EDGE

Martin Edge was born in Staffordshire, England in 1955 where he grew up without any inclination towards diving or photography. Years later, he moved to the Dorset coastline and in 1977 it was here he learnt to dive. He had never had any particular interest or tuition in photography, but his desire to shoot pictures underwater grew into a passion bordering on an obsession. Over the last 20 years he has introduced, developed, motivated and mentored hundreds of underwater photographers.

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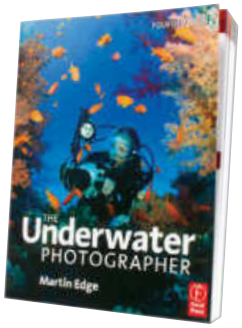

## RECSEA HOUSINGS | £400-£550 (€572.79-€787.59)

Recsea, the Japanese specialist housing maker, has announced new housing models for the Olympus TG-3 and TG-4, and the Panasonic TZ70. For the Olympus Tough cameras TG-3 and TG-4, there is a choice of two housings. A 130m-depth aluminium housing (£550), which is ideal for technical divers who want to take a compact camera with them when they venture into the depths, and a 60m-depth CNC precision-machined, corrosion-resistant POM housing (£400), which features Recsea's dial-locking system for easier opening and closing, flash window with built-in diffuser, and rear mode dial and push button functions for complete camera control.

Both have a standard Sea&Sea fibre-optic connector and a 67mm lens adapter for the attachment of both wide-angle and macro lenses, and filters, plus a wrist strap, lens cap, reserve O-ring set, O-ring grease and an O-ring removal pick.

For the Panasonic TZ70, Recsea has made a lightweight, 60m-depth POM housing with a choice of interchangeable lens ports. The housing is packaged with either a 30x lens port to be able to utilize the camera's long zoom (£550) or with a macro port (£535). The macro port option also includes a 67mm lens adapter for fitting additional macro lenses. When using the macro port version, the camera's zoom lever is locked so that the zoom cannot inadvertently be operated.

**www.camerasunderwater.co.uk**

## SEA & SEA YS-D2 | £579.95 (€830.47)

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**www.sea-sea.com**

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Get your Award Ceremony tickets here:

**www.eventbrite.com** and search for **Sport Diver Awards**

~~SUPER EARLY BIRD **£10.00** SOLD OUT~~ • EARLY BIRD **£13.25** - 50% already SOLD • GENERAL ADMISSION **£19.50**

INCLUDES: Entry for 1, finger buffet, selected alcoholic or soft drink on reception.

VIP TABLES - **£1,200** • INCLUDES: Table for 8, front row seating, finger buffet, free drinks (selected beers, wines and soft drinks while stocks last)

# READERS PHOTO COMPETITION

# WIN A GOPRO

GOPRO HERO RRP £99.99

SPONSORED BY Cameras Underwater

**The Pit, by Nikki Irvine**

"On the last day of our club's Mexican adventure, a handful of us ventured into the jungle to dive the magnificent 'El Pit' cenote. Days of tropical storms meant we were treated to a rarely seen, surreal green light - our guide had never seen it before!

"Under the stalactite-laden overhang, I was looking out and up to my dearest buddy, peacefully silhouetted against the cenote opening. Slowly, I brought my camera up and fired this shot without him noticing, which makes it more special to me - I know in this moment he was so content, just privately enjoying that very beautiful place."

Pretty basic setup - Canon S120 (Ikelite housing) and i-Das Fish-eye on preset underwater mode with manual white balance. Location: El Pit cenote, Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, June 2015.

Cameras Underwater

WWW.CAMERASUNDERWATER.CO.UK

TEL: 01404812277

TO ENTER UPLOAD YOUR PICTURES TO WWW.SPORTDIVER.CO.UK/GALLERY

# Bring some colour to your photography

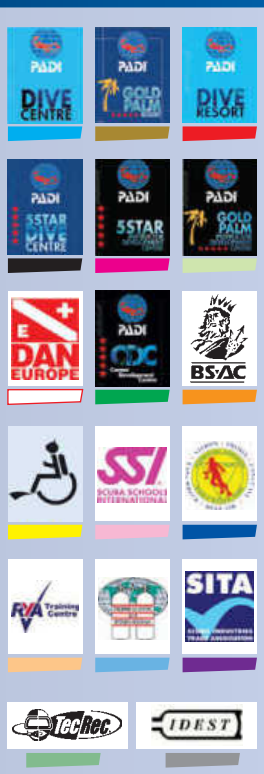
## Cameras Underwater

tel: 01404812277

www.camerasunderwater.co.uk

# UK DIVE OPERATORS

## DIRECTORY KEY




## SHOP KEY

OSS.....Onsite servicing
OST.....Onsite testing
BS.....Testing to British Standards

## OVERSEAS ABBREVIATIONS

ACC.....Accommodation
AIP.....All inclusive package
AT.....Airport transfers
AYRD.....All year round diving
BH.....Boat hire
CAOS.....Compressed air onsite
CH.....Car hire
EA.....Environment activities
EH.....Equipment hire
ESI.....English speaking instructors
FCF.....Families catered for
LB.....Liveaboards
NDCF.....Non-divers catered for
OWs.....Other watersports
TD.....Tech diving
UWP.....Underwater photography

# ENGLAND

## BERKSHIRE

### DIVESTYLE

**DIVESTYLE Unit A**
**Bridge Farm,**
**Reading Road,**
**Arborfield,**
**Berkshire, RG2 9HT**
**Tel:** 0118 976 1729
**Fax:** 0118 926 9616
**Email:** info@divestyle.co.uk
**Website:** www.divestyle.co.uk
**Opening Hours:** M, T, T, F 10:00-18:00 W 10:00-20:00 S 10:00 - 17:00. Air To 300 Bar. PADI 5★ IDC. Nitrox, National Geographic. EH, ESI, TD, EA, FCF, AYRD. PADI IDC centre, Nitrox, Trimix, equipment retail, PADI, SSI, BSAC, EFR, DSAT, TDI, rebreather friendly, Family friendly, child friendly, kids parties (4 weeks notice).

## CORNWALL

### KENNACK DIVING

**Sea Acres Holiday Park,**
**Kennack Sands, Helston,**
**Cornwall TR127LT**
**Tel: 07816 903260**
**Email:** mail@kennackdiving.co.uk
**Website:** www.kennackdiving.co.uk
**Opening Hours:** 09.00-1800
Air to 232 Bar. PADI 5★ Dive Resort. EH, AYRD, UWP, CAOS. PADI Courses from Bubblemaker to Assistant Instructor, specialities & guided dives all with friendly local Instructors. Equipment Hire, Heated indoor pool, on site, accommodation available.

### CORNISH DIVING SCHOOL

**Bar Road, Falmouth**
**Cornwall TR11 4BN**
**Tel: 07885 771282 &**
**07779 445851**
**Email:** info@cornishdivingschool.co.uk
**Website:** www.cornishdivingschool.co.uk
**Opening Hours:** 09.00-17.30
Air to 300 Bar. PADI 5 ★ IDC. Boat Dives. Novice-Instructor. Dive Shop. Shore diving. Escorted Dives. Onsite Pool. Friendly Helpful Staff. Suit Repairs. DSD. Watersports. Snorkeling. EH, ESI, AYRD, UWP, CAOS, FCF, NDCF.

## DERBYSHIRE

### CHESTERFIELD ADVENTURE CENTRE

**Wheatbridge Road, Off**
**DockWall, Chesterfield,**
**Derbyshire, S40 2AB**
**Tel:** 01246 245408
**Email:** info@divenut.co.uk
**Website:** www.divenut.co.uk
**Opening hours:** Tues-Sat 10am-6pm Air to 300 Bar. PADI 5★ IDC, OSS, BS, EH. Full range of courses from beginner to instructor. Equipment sales, dive club, group holidays. Nitrox, Poseidon rebreather sales & training. Easy parking. 3 pool nights.

## ESSEX

### DIVERSE SCUBA

**Ye Olde Plough House Motel,**
**Brentwood Road,**
**Bulphan,**
**Essex, RM14 3SR**
**Tel/Fax:** 01375 892444
**Mob:** 07814 570165
**Email:** jeanne-marie@diverse-scuba.co.uk
**Website:** www.diverse-scuba.co.uk
**Opening Hours:** Office & Shop: Monday to Thursday 10.30am -7pm. Saturday 10am to 2pm. Training pool: 6pm to 9.30pm. Closed Friday, Sunday & Bank Holidays. Our own On Site Pool, Air to 300 Bar, PADI 5★ IDC. OSS, EH,On Site Pool FCF, Acc, Restaurant Facilities. Complete range of PADI courses available, from Discover Scuba through to Instructor, with resident course director, Full range of specialities, classroom. Dive shop. Social events and holidays.

## HAMPSHIRE

### ANDARK DIVING AND WATERSPORTS

**256 Bridge Road,**
**Lower Swanwick,**
**Southampton**
**SO31 7FL**
**Tel:** 01489 581755
**Fax:** 01489 575223
**Email:** bookings@andark.co.uk
**Website:** www.andark.co.uk
**Andark Lake Tel:** 01489 885811
**Email:** lake@andark.co.uk
**Opening Hours:** Mon/Thu and Sat 9am TO 6 pm, Fri 9am TO 8pm, Sun 9:30 to 5pm
NITROX/TRIMIX. Onsite pool and classrooms. Fully equiped friendly shop. Online sales. Powerboat courses. Underwater escape training. Holidays. Andark lake. Kids Parties. Activity Club. Onisite Servicing. Commercial diving Courses. Parking PADI 5★ IDC. BSAC Premier Centre. RYA Centre. HSE Commercial Diver Training and First Aid Centre EH. LB. ESI. TD. EA. AIP. FCF. AYRD. UWP. NDCF. CAOS

## KENT

### DIVE MACHINE

**Unit 11 Orchard Business Centre,**
**SandersonWay,**
**Tonbridge,**
**Kent**
**TN9 1QF**
**Tel:** 01732 773553
**Fax:** 01732 773663
**Website:** www.divemachine.com
**Email:** robert@divemachine.com
**Opening Hours:** Mon-Sat 09.30-17.30,Weds 09.30-19.00. Air to 300 bar, nitrox, trimix, idest. PADI CDC, PADI Courses from beginner to instructor. IANTD, Nitrox. Specialities: Enriched air, Dry suit, Photographer, Deep, Night, Underwater navigator, wreck, Oxygen first aid, DAN 02, Boat, Equipment and Drift. Authorised dealer for most leading mfctrs. Large display area. Classrooms. Large free car park. Professional, friendly service & advice. Regulator Services. Suit repairs. Holidays abroad and in the UK.

## LONDON

### AQUANAUT SCUBA & SNORKELLING CENTRE

**34 Coombe Road,**
**Kingston Upon**
**Thames, Surrey,**
**KT2 7AG**
**Tel:** 0208 546 8882
**Email:** info@aquanautscuba.co.uk
**Website:** www.aquanautscuba.co.uk
**Opening Hours:** Monday - 11am-6pm, Tuesday - 11am-6pm, Wednesday - 11am-6pm, Thursday 11am – 7pm, Friday - 11am-6pm, Saturday – 10am – 6pm, Sunday – by appointment. Nitrox & Air to 300bar, 5★ IDC Centre / IDEST and BSAC Centre. SITA member. OSS OST BS CAOS EH TD. Courses from beginner to instuctor, Fully stocked dive shop with excellent purchasing advice, Friendly and very active dive clubwith UK and overseas trips and social.

### LODGE SCUBA

**8 Hampton Road,**
**Thornton Heath,**
**London,**
**CR0 2XG**
**Tel:** 0208 765 1036
**Email:** info@lodgescuba.co.uk
**Website:** www.lodgescuba.com
**Opening Hours:** 10:30am-7pm Tues-Sat.
Air to 232 Bar. EH, ESI, TD, EA, AYRD, UWP, NDCF, CAOS. Nitrox, Trimix, Oxygen. PADI 5 ★ IDC, BSAC, TDI, NAUI, NACD. Servicing, cylinder testing, technical diving, equipment hire, large equipped shop with changing facilities, childrens parties, government run pool sessions, classroom, online sales, recreational diving, large parking area, courses and equipment, Cafe, BBQ Area.

## MIDDLESEX

### G & H DIVING SERVICES LTD

**Unit 1, Willow House,**
**River Gardens,**
**N Feltham Trading Estate,**
**TW14 0RD.**
**Tel:** 020 8751 3771 / 020 8890 3302
**Fax:** 020 8751 2591
**E-mail:** gerryhassell@gheng.com
**Website:** Under construction
**Opening Hours:** 8.30 - 5.30 Mon to Friday.
8.30 - 12 noon Sat.
Air to 300 Bar. BSAC, TDI, SDI & PSA. EH, TD, CAOS. Cylinder testing IDEST 2v, Regulator servicing, Air, Nitrox, Trimix, TDI Technical courses. Suit repairs.

## SUSSEX

### OCEAN VIEW DIVING SERVICES LTD

**160 South Street,**
**Lancing,**
**West Sussex**
**BN15 8AU.**
**Tel:** 01903 767224
**Fax:** 01903 754361
**Email:** info@oceanviewdiving.co.uk
**Website:** www.oceanviewdiving.co.uk
PADI 5★ IDC Centre. IANTD, TDI. OSS, OST, EH, BS. Air to 300 Bar, Nitrox. Padi Tec Rec. Tri-mix. Mail order, suit repairs, holidays abroad, on-site indoor pool. Licenced bar and club. Largest selection of equipment in Sussex.

## YORKSHIRE

### THE DIVERS WAREHOUSE

**911 Wakefield Road,**
**Tong, Bradford,**
**West Yorkshire,**
**BD4 7QA**
**Tel:** 01274 307 555
**Email:** sales@diverswarehouse.co.uk
**Website:** www.diverswarehouse.co.uk
Opening Hours 8:30 - 17:30 Mon - Sat , Thursday 8:30 - 20:30, Sunday Closed. Air to (BAR) 300. EH, ESI, TD, EA, FCF, AYRD, UWP, CAOS. Nitrox. PADI 5★, SSI. Servicing, Cylinder testing (IDEST approved), Equipment Hire, Large Equipped shop with changing facilities, classroom, online sales, large parking area, PADI + SSI courses. Everything Scuba!

### THE DIVER TRAINING COLLEGE

**Malt Kiln Lane,**
**Appleton Roebuck,**
**York,**
**North Yorkshire**
**YO23 7DT**
**Tel:** 01904 744424 / 07967 742420
**Fax:** 01904 744724
**Email:** ops@cdms-diving.co.uk
**Website:** www.dtc-diving.co.uk
**Opening hours:** 9.00am-5.00pm Mon-Sat.
Air to 300 Bar. PADI 5★ Centre, OSS-OST-BS-Nitrox. Full range of PADI specialities, RYA courses and specialist commercial diving courses. Full range of equipment sales from our well stocked dive shop. Open Mon-Sat.

### ROBIN HOOD WATERSPORTS

**152 Leeds Road,**
**Heckmondwike,**
**West Yorkshire**
**WF16 9BJ**
**Tel:** 01924 444888
**Fax:** 01924 474529
**E-mail:** sally@roho.co.uk
**Website:** www.roho.co.uk
**Opening Hours:** Open Times: Mon, Tues, Weds, Fri - 9.15-6pm Thurs 9.15-8pm Sat - 9.15 -5pm. OSS,OST, BS, IDEST, EH, Nitrox. PADI Dive Centre, BSAC Premier level. Training in our on-site heated pool and lecture rooms. Home of the renowned ROHO drysuits. Nitrox courses & fills. Gigantic 5000sq ft showroom fully stocked with dive watersports & snowboarding equipment. Friendly, helpful staff and instructors. Equipment hire.

# IRELAND

## CO CORK

### OCEANADDICTS

**Kinsale, Co. Cork, Ireland**
**Tel:** 00353 (0)87-7903211
**Email:** anne@oceanaddicts.ie
**Website:** www.oceanaddicts.ie
**Opening Hours:** 9.00am to 6.00pm. Air to 300, PADI Resort, DAN, LB, ESI, ACC, AT, UWP, NDCF, CAOS, Nitrox. Liveaboard and day-boat diving, groups and individuals welcome, friendly atmosphere, wrecks and reefs, great photo opportunities, courses available, live the adventure on Ireland's South Coast.

## CO DONEGAL

### MEVAGH DIVE CENTRE LTD

**Milford Road, Carrighat, Letterkenny,**
**Co. Donegal, Ireland**
**Tel:** 00353 749154708
**Mob:** 00353 8765 90264
**Email:** reception@mevaghdiving.com
**Website:** www.mevaghdiving.com
**Opening Hours:** 9am to 7.30pm. Air to 300 Bar, PADI 5★ Dive Centre, EH, ESI, TD, AIP, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, CH, BH, NDCF, CAOS, Nitrox, Tri Mix. Mevagh Dive Centre PADI 5 *. All levels of diving including Technical diving. 11m catamaran with dive lift. Accommodation with Swimming pool.

# NORTHERN IRELAND

## COUNTY DOWN

### DV DIVING

**138 Mount Steward Road, Newtownards, Co. Down, BT22 2ES.**
**Tel:** 02891 464671/861686
Fax: 02891 464671
**Email:** info@dvdiving.co.uk
**Website:** www.dvdiving.co.uk
OSS, OST, BS, EH. DV Diving offer one of Europe's most comprehensive ranges of scuba, technical & commercial diving and powerboat training courses - for the complete beginner through to instructor development for the most experienced professionals

## PORTSTEWART

### AQUAHOLICS DIVE CENTRE

**14 Portmore Road, Portstewart**
**Tel:** 28 70832584
**Email:** dive@aquaholics.org
**Website:** www.aquaholics.org
**Opening Hours:** 9am to 5pm. Air to 300 Bar. PADI 5★ CENTRE. NITROX, TRIMIX. EH, ESI, TD, EA, AIP, ACC, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, CH, BH, NDCF, CAOS. Offering the full range of courses from Beginner to Trimix. Diving the spectacular clear water of the North Coast from Rathlin Island to Malin Head.

# OVERSEAS DIVE OPERATORS

## AUSTRALIA

LIVEABOARD

Australia - Cairns

**Spirit of Freedom**
www.spiritoffreedom.com.au

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 26 | **Elec.** | 240 |
| **Cabins** | 11 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 37m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Steel | **CCR** | N |

LIVEABOARD

Australia - Cairns, Queensland

**Spoilsport**
www.mikeball.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 29 | **Elec.** | 240 |
| **Cabins** | 15 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 30m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Aluminium | **CCR** | Y |

## BALI

### AQUAMARINE DIVING - BALI

**2A Jalan Petitenget,**
**Kuta,**
**Bali, 80361, Indonesia**
**Tel:** +623614738020
**Email:** info@AquaMarineDiving.com
**Website:** www.AquaMarineDiving.com
**Opening Hours:** We are open 7days a week and from 7am to 7pm.
Air to (BAR) 200. EH, LB, ESI, EA, AIP, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, CH, BH, NDCF, CAOS. Nitrox. 5★ Dive Resort. AquaMarine Diving – Bali is dedicated to ensuring you experience Bali's best diving, from Day Trips to fully–inclusive underwater macro-photography Safaris, Intro-diving and Snorkelling, PADI courses to Divemaster and many Specialties (including the Manta Ray Awareness Specialty).

## CAYMAN ISLANDS

### SUNSET HOUSE - GRAND CAYMAN'S HOTEL FOR DIVERS BY DIVERS

**390 South Church Street**
**PO Box 479GT Grand Cayman**
**Cayman Islands**
**Tel:** 1-345-949-7111
**Fax:** 1-345-949-7101
**Email:** keith.sahm@sunsethouse.com
**Website:** www.sunsethouse.com
**Opening Hours:** 7:00 - 17:30 (Dive Centre Hours). Air To 200 Bar. Stingray City and ex-USS Kittiwake Adventures. PADI 5★ IDC. EH, ESI, EA, Acc, FCF, AT (with packages), AYRD, UWP, CH, BH, NDCF, CAOS (with packages). Full-Service dive operations located at Sunset House. Recreational boat dives. Incredible shore diving. Nitrox. Cathy Church. U/W photo centre. 53 Rooms for accommodations. Bar, restaurant onsite. Stepping out of my room, catching that breath of fragrant tropical breeze, gazing into the alluring blue water…I found the essence of Sunset House.

## CYPRUS

### ALPHA DIVERS

**2 Pyla Gardens, Dhekelia Road, Larnaca, Pyla Tourist Area, 7081, Cyprus**
**Tel:** +357 24647519
+357 99866383
**Email:** info@alpha-divers.com
**Website:** www.alpha-divers.com
5 star PADI Instructor Development & Tec Rec Centre, BSAC Tec Centre and Seamanship Centre offering the very highest in course from beginner to Instructor.

### CYDIVE DIVE CYPRUS

**20,Myrra Complex 33, Poseidonos Ave 1, Paphos 8042, Cyprus.**
**Tel:** 00 357 26 934271
**Email:** info@cydive.com
**Website:** www.cydive.com
PADI. The First PADI 5★ Career Development Centre & Centre of Excellence in Cyprus. CAOS, EH, CH,AIP,Acc, FCF,AT, ESI's, EAs', BH, AYRD, UWP, OW's, NDCF. Fantastic Location, an exciting programme with 2 Boat Dives & Daytrips Daily. Instructor programmes 4 times a year.

### LARNACA DIVE-IN

**HTTC Ltd (Hyperbaric Therapy Treatment Ctr)**
**Poseidonia Medical Centre**
**47a Eleftherias Avenue,**
**Aradippou, Larnaca,**
**CYPRUS 7102**
**Tel:** 00357 24 252501/24 hr
Emergency Diver Help Line 99 518837
**Fax:** 00357 24 252502
**Email:** info@hbocyprus.com
**Website:** www.hbocyprus.com
Opening Hours: 9-5 Mon -Sat.
24/7 Emergency Diver Response. Air to 232 Bar.
If you are concerned or feel that you have unusual signs or symptoms after a dive please always get it checked. We have a 24/7, 365 days service with a full Hyperbaric Medical team on standby at our 14 man fully computerized, HAUX 2200 Starmed Unit. We are the Preferred Provider for IDAN, UK Armed Forces, US Armed Forces, NATO and many more. We offer Direct Insurance billing for all treatments. Also Dry Dives to 40 metres, PADI Chamber Specialty Courses, DAN In-Chamber Tender Courses, DAN Chamber Operator Courses, DAN Consumer and Instructor Courses to all Levels.

## EGYPT

LIVEABOARD

Egypt, Sharm El Sheikh

**VIP One**
www.vipone.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 16 | **Elec.** | 220 |
| **Cabins** | 8 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 29m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Wood | **CCR** | N |

LIVEABOARD

Egypt

**South Moon**
www.seaqueen.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 20 | **Elec.** | 240/110 |
| **Cabins** | 10 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 27m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Wood | **CCR** | N |

### CAMEL DIVE CLUB & HOTEL

**Centre of Na'ama Bay,**
**PO Box 10,**
**Sharm El Sheikh,**
**South Sinai,**
**Egypt.**
**Tel:** +20 69 3600 700
**Fax:** +20 69 3600 601
**Email:** info@cameldive.com
**Website:** www.cameldive.com
PADI 5★ Gold Palm IDC Centre, BSAC, Acc. AT, LB, ESI, EA, BH, AYRD, UWP, OW, NDCF, TD, CAOS, EH, FCF. The Red Seas friendliest diver hotel and dive centre. Join us for spectacular diving and the best apres dive in Sharm.
Established 1986

### EAGLE DIVERS

**Ocean Club Hotel,**
**23 City Council Street,**
**Hadaba,**
**Sharm el Sheikh**
**Tel:** 002 01200001590
002 01200001591
**Email:** info@eagle-divers.com
**Website:** www.eagle-divers.com
**Opening Hours:** 8.00am - 6.00pm
PADI 5* resort & TecRec Centre.
Nitrox. Air to 220 Bar. EH, LB, ESI, TD, EA, AIP, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, NDCF, CAOS. Providing first class personalised service in one of the worlds top diving destinations.
We pride ourselves on making your Red Sea holiday the best it can be.

# OVERSEAS DIVE OPERATORS

## ELITE DIVING'S DIVERS UNITED

**Uni Sharm Hotel, Sharm Elysees St, Um El Sid Hill, Hadaba, Sharm El Sheikh**
**Tel:** 0020 1224 308 780
**Email:** info@elite-diving.com
**Web:** www.elite-diving.com
**Opening Hours:** 8.00am to 19.00pm
Air to 220 Bar. Divers United PADI 5 Resort. Elite Diving. BSAC Diver Traning Center.EH, LB, ESI, EA, AIP, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, BH, NDCF, CAOS. NITROX, ATOL Bonded through UK Tour operator. British Owner managers, offering Daily Boat Diving on some of the best reefs in the world, House reef, PADI & BSAC courses, Liveaboards, Special excursions.

## ILIOS DIVE CLUB

**Steigenberger Al Dau Resort, Hurghada, Red Sea, Egypt**
**Tel:** 0020 65 346 5442
**Email:** info@iliosdiveclub.com
**Website:** www.iliosdiveclub.com
**Opening Hours:** 8am - 5pm
Air to 200 Bar, Nitrox, Padi Course up to Divemaster, Handicapped diving, Snorkeling. EH, ESI, EA, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, BH, NDCF, CAOS. Ilios Dive Club – One with the Red Sea. The Steigenberger Al Dau Resort, Red Sea, Hurghada is the home of Ilios Dive Club. On an area of 360m² we are offering everything diver, skin diver and those going to be need to have a perfect holiday. Due to over 20 years of experience in the professional management of a dive centre we guarantee our guests wonderful dives in the Red Sea.

## OCEAN COLLEGE

**Naama Bay Hotel, Naama Bay, Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt**
**Tel:** 0020 1228075516
**Email:** info@ocean-college.com
**Website:** www.ocean-college.com
**Opening Hours:** 0800 – 1700.
Air to 300 Bar. PADI 5★IDC, Nitrox, ATOL Bonded. EH, ESI, EA, AIP, FCF, AYRD, UWP, BH, NDCF, CAOS. Ocean College dive centre's are located at the Naama bay hotel, the Hilton Waterfalls and the Sensatori resort..

## RED SEA DIVING COLLEGE

**Sultana Building, Naama Bay, South Sinai, Egypt**
**Tel:** 0020 69 3600145
**Email:** info@redseacollege.com
**Website:** www.redseacollege.com
**Opening hours:** 8am - 9pm.
Air to 200 Bar. EH, LB, ESI, TD, EA, ACC, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, BH, NDCF, CAOS. Nitrox, National Geographic. PADI 5★ CDC. Multi Award winning centre offering all courses from entry level to professional. Conducted from a stunning beach-front location, boasting the best facilities in Sharm.

## SINAI COLLEGE - DIVING CENTER

**Sharm Inn Amarin, Hadaba, Sharm El Sheikh South Sinai 60907, Egypt**
**Tel:** +201154055100
**Email:** info@sinai-college.com
**Website:** www.sinai-college.com
**Opening hours:** 7.30am till 7pm every day of the year. Air to 200 Bar. EH, LB, ESI, EA, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, NDCF, COAS. Nitrox, PADI Dive Centre. We are an European run and managed dive center based in Sharm El Sheikh with a friendly and professional atmosphere. We provide daily diving, mini safaris and liveaboards.

## FUERTEVENTURA

### DEEP BLUE DIVING S.L

**Barcelo el Castillo, Caleta de Fuste, Fuerteventura, 35610**
**Tel:** +34 606 275 468 or +34 928 163 172
**Email:** info@deep-blue-diving.com
**Website:** www.deep-blue-diving.com
**Facebook:** Deep.Blue.Diving.Fuerteventura
**Opening Hours:** All year 9am-5pm
Air to 200. PADI 5★ GOLD PALM IDC CENTRE & IE LOCATION. EH, ESI, AIP, ACC, FCF, AYRD, UWP, NDCF, CAOS. WIFI, Equipment Washing and Storage Rooms. Discover Scuba to Instructor. All year round, water front location, small groups, 20-25m visibilty. Exclusive dive sites, after dive sector.

## GREECE

### CRETE UNDERWATER CENTER

**Mirabello Beach Hotel, Agios Nikolaos 72100 Crete, Greece. PO Box 100**
**Tel/Fax:** 00 30 284 1022 406
**Mobile:** 0030 6945 2444 34 / 0030 6944 1268 46
**Email:** info@creteunderwatercenter.com
**Website:** www.creteunderwatercenter.com
PADI Resort D.C.,Day Boats/ Servicing/ Accommodation/ Technical/ IANTD/ PADI/BSAC ResortCenter/Air /Nitrox/ Trimix/ KitonSale. Based within a hotel complex directly on the beach, we provide a great variety of diving services for Beginners through to Advanced and TechnicalDivers .As a well equipped resort and diving centre, we tailor packages to suit your individual or group needs.

### NERO-SPORT DIVING CENTER

**Limni Keri, Machairado, Zakynthos 29092 Greece**
**Tel:** 0030 269 502 8481
0030 698 566 6645
**Email:** dennis@nero-sport.de
**Website:** www.nero-sport.de
**Opening Hours:** All Year, Everyday 9:30 - 18:00 (Except 15.11. - 15.12.)
Air to 200 Bar. PADI DIVE CENTRE, IAC 5★ EH, ESI, Acc, AT, FCF, AYRD, UWP, NDCF, CAOS. Free childcare. 2-5 trips a day. Day trips. Night diving. Own accommodation. Snack bar. Great family offers. Special group offers. Diving all year round.

## GALAPAGOS

### LIVEABOARD

San Cristobal, Galapagos
**M/V Galapagos Sky**
www.galapagossky.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 16 | **Elec.** | 110/220 |
| **Cabins** | 8 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 30m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Steel | **CCR** | N |

## HONDURAS

### LIVEABOARD

Utila, Bay Islands of Honduras
**M/V Caribbean Pearl II**
www.bayislandsyachtcharters.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 18 | **Elec.** | 220 |
| **Cabins** | 9 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 36m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Aluminium | **CCR** | N |

### UTILA DIVE CENTRE/MANGO INN

**Utila, Bay Islands, Honduras**
**Tel/Fax:** (504) 24253327
**Email:** info@utiladivecentre.com
**Website:** www.utiladivecentre.com
www.goproutila.com
**Opening Hours:** 7am to 7pm
Air to 220 Bar. PADI Career Development Centre and IANTD facility. Nitrox, Trimix, Rebreather friendly, National Geographic Facility. EH, ESI, TD, EA, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, CAOS. PADI certification courses from beginner to Instructor (monthly PADI IDC's) with diving packages and accommodation. The island of Utila offers spectacular Caribbean diving and Whale sharks.

## INDONESIA

### BIG BUBBLE DIVE

**Turtle Beach, Gili Trawangan, Lombok NTB, Indonesia 83233.**
**Tel:** +623706125020
+62811390969
**Email:** info@bigbubblediving.com
**Website:** www.bigbubblediving.com
**Open:** 8am to 7pm daily all year round
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**Gili Trawangan, Gili Meno, Gili Air, Senggigi, Lombok, Indonesia.**
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**Email:** info@bluemarlindive.com
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PADI 5★ Premier IDC Centre. Acc., AT, LB, ESI, EA, BH, AYRD, UWP, OW, NDCF, TD, EH, CH, AIP, CAOS, FCF. The Gili Islands most professional & friendly 5★ IDC Centre (estblished 16 years). Spectacular world class ocean diving. Ocean front restaurant, bar, night club & freshwater pool. Full retail dive shop on site. DM internship programmes. Full technical diving facility offering TDI & IANTD. Blue Marlin has it's own luxury livaboard offering trips throughout the Indonesian Archipelago. Packages available.

## TWO FISH DIVERS

**One operator/three tropical-island resorts: Bunaken Island, North Sualwesi Lembeh Straits, North Sualwesi Lembongan Island, Bali**
**Tel:** 0062-811-432-805
**Email:** info@twofishdivers.com
**Website:** www.twofishdivers.com
Air to 200 bar. PADI 5★ IDC. Nitrox, EH, ESI, TD, EA, AIP, Acc, FCF, AT, AYRD, UWP, NDCF, CAOS. Two Fish Divers is owned and run by Tina and Nigel from UK. Each of their three tropical-island resorts offer a friendly and relaxed atmosphere with some of the best diving in Indonesia:
1) Bunaken Island, North Sulawesi - the award-winning reefs of Bunaken Marine Park.
2) Lembeh Straits, North Sulawesi - the muck-diving capital of the world.
3) Lembongan Island, Bali - home of the mola-mola's and manta's of Bali.
All dive resorts are PADI 5★ , have european management, max 24divers, small dive groups, and a friendly and personal service. Organise a trip to one of more of these resorts, or book an Indo Dive Safari with all three resorts!

## LANZAROTE

### MANTA DIVING LANZAROTE

**Juan Carlos 1, No.6, Local 5, Puerto del Carmen**
**Tel:** (0034) 928 516815
**Mobile:** (0034) 649 121142
**Email:** info@manta-diving-lanzarote.com
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**Email:** enquiry@safaridiving.com
**Website:** www.safaridiving.com
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### DIVE DEEP BLUE MALTA

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**Mob:** 00 356 99 868957
**Email:** dive@divedeepblue.com
**Website:** www.divedeepblue.com
**Opening Hours:** 8am till 6pm.
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### DIVESHACK SCUBA SCHOOL

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**Email:** info@divemalta.com
**Website:** www.divemalta.com
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### DIVEWISE

**Westin Dragonara Resort, Malta**
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**Email:** info@divewise.com.mt
**Website:** www.divewise.com.mt
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### GOZO AQUA SPORTS

**GOZO AQUA SPORTS, Rubat Road, Marsalforn, Gozo, Malta, MFN 9014**
**Tel:** 0035621563037
**Email:** dive@gozoaquasports.com
**Website:** www.gozoaquasports.com
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Air to 300 Bar. PADI 5★ IDC - DSAT TECREC centre & BSAC Resort, ESI, TD, Acc, AT, AYRD, UWP, CH, BH, NDCF, CAOS, Nitrox and Trimix Available, Technical & Rebreather Diver Support. Free WI-FI, Free Tea/Coffee/Water, Rinsing/Drying/Storage facilities, Wreck, Boat, Cavern, Digital Photography, Drysuit, Enriched Air, Equipment Specialist, Multilevel, Naturalist, Navigation, Night, PPB, Oxygen Provider, Search & Recovery, Project AWARE Fish ID Specialities.

### PARADISE DIVING

**Paradise Diving, Paradise Bay Resort Hotel, Cirkewwa, MLH9068, Malta**
**Tel:** 0035621574116
0035621524363
**Email:** alison@paradisediving.com
**Website:** www.paradisediving.com
**Open:** May to October 08.30-17.00 Daily. November to April by advance reservation.
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**Fax:** +356 2152 1062
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**Website:** www.scubaclubcozumel.com
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### LIVEABOARD

Cabo San Lucas & Ensenada, Mexico

**Solmar V**
www.solmarv.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 22 | **Elec.** | 110/220 |
| **Cabins** | 12 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 34m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Steel | **CCR** | Y |

### LIVEABOARD

Mexico

**Nautilus Explorer**
www.nautilusexplorer.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 25 | **Elec.** | 120 |
| **Cabins** | 13 | **Courses** | N |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 35m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Steel | **CCR** | Y |

### LIVEABOARD

Mexico

**Nautilus Belle Amie**
www.nautilusbelleamie.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 30 | **Elec.** | 120 |
| **Cabins** | 17 | **Courses** | N |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 41m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Steel | **CCR** | Y |

## PALAU

### LIVEABOARD

Koror, Palau

**Ocean Hunter Palau**
www.oceanhunter.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 18 | **Elec.** | 240 |
| **Cabins** | 9 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 31m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Steel | **CCR** | Y |

### LIVEABOARD

Malakal, Palau

**Solitude One**
www.solitude-one.com

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Passengers** | 22 | **Elec.** | 220 |
| **Cabins** | 10 | **Courses** | Y |
| **En-suite** | Y | **AirCon** | Y |
| **Length** | 52m | **Nitrox** | Y |
| **Hull** | Steel | **CCR** | Y |

## PHILIPPINES

### THRESHER SHARK DIVERS

**Malaapscua Island, Cebu 6013 Philippines**
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**Fax:** +63324370985
**Email:** dive@thresherdivers.com
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**Website:** www.similan-diving-safaris.com
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# Meet Monty Halls and Andy Torbet at the Sport Diver Awards 2015

Nominate your favourite companies and people to be in with the chance of winning the trip of a lifetime to the luxurious Waktobi Dive Resort and Pelagic liveaboard.

With just a couple of months to go before this year's Sport Diver Awards it's time to give you, our readers, a reminder of what is on offer at this year's event…

Most excitingly, by casting your vote for your favourite companies, products and people within the world of diving you could win the trip of a lifetime to the luxurious Wakatobi Dive Resort. Just visit www.sportdiver.co.uk/vote and fill in the questionnaire. Even if you don't win the top prize, the Awards represent an opportunity to applaud those who deserve it.

Almost as exciting as the opportunity to win a fabulous holiday are this year's hosts: Messrs Monty Halls and Andy Torbet. The pair will take to the stage at this year's ceremony - set for the Saturday evening of the October Dive Show - to announce the winners, hand out the trophies and no doubt regale the crowd with a tale or two… If you would like to attend this year's event, which is open to the public for the very first time and promises to be one hell of a party, visit **www.sportdiver.co.uk/awards2015**

**THE AWARD CATEGORIES:**

**BEST MANUFACTURER**

Quality equipment can make all the difference to a dive. Is there a manufacturer you think churns out unparalleled gear time after time? If there is, let us know, because we feel such folk should be recognised for the benefits they bring to the diving community.

**BEST TOUR OPERATOR**

Have you had the ultimate dive experience recently? Tour operators obviously play an integral part in making our dive holidays what they are, and this is your opportunity to the tip the proverbial hat to those you deem to be truly outstanding.

**BEST LIVEABOARD**

The quality of a liveaboard can make or break a trip. Generally home for at least a week, it is important customers feel comfortable and looked after. If you've stayed on a particularly well-run boat, with great staff and a fabulous itinerary, why not let the dive community know about it by casting a vote?

**BEST UK DIVE CENTRE**

Here at Sport Diver we love UK diving and get in the water as much as possible. Our coastline (and interior) is littered with quality centres offering fantastic local diving and dive trips. If you think there's one centre that trumps the rest, now's the time to give it a shout-out.

**BEST OVERSEAS DIVE CENTRE**

The overseas dive market is hugely competitive, particularly in world-renowned hotspots such as the Red Sea's Sharm el Sheikh. It is awards such as this that allow the truly exceptional dive centres to stand out from the crowd, thrive, and continue to offer such wonderful service to the diving community.

**BEST RETAILER**

Which such an array of diving gear on the market, a well-stocked and informative retailer can be the difference between money well spent and money wasted. Diving's not the cheapest of sports, so it's essential you get your decisions right. Is there a retailer you think offers an unparalleled level of product range and service quality?

**MOST INNOVATIVE PRODUCT**

Select your favourite bit of kit from an array of products from the major manufacturers, including Scubapro, Aqualung, Oceanic, Mares, Hollis, Poseidon and Fourth Element.

**BEST PADI INSTRUCTOR**

Completing a PADI course, whether it is your Open Water or your Instructorship, takes time and effort. Our teachers ultimately have a huge impact on both whether or not we pass and our competence as a diver beyond that. Excellent teachers should be acknowledged for the good of the sport, and this is your chance to rave about someone deserving.

**CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR**

A great many divers are eco-aware - it's all part and parcel of appreciating and respecting the underwater world we cherish. But do you know someone who has gone above and beyond in the name of ocean conservation? If so, this is your chance to have their efforts recognised within the dive community.

**BEST DESTINATION**

Where have you been in the last 12 months? Was there a particular destination that blew you away? Were you lucky enough to experience the dive destination of all dive destinations? If so, let us know where it is!

**GET VOTING!**

You can cast your vote by visiting **www.sportdiver.co.uk/vote**. Please visit the Sport Diver website for full terms and conditions.

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